

**U N I O N.**

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**BY**

**D. H. RANNEY.**

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THE  
EVANGELICAL CHURCH;  
OR  
TRUE GROUNDS  
FOR  
THE UNION OF THE SAINTS.

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## INTRODUCTION.

When an individual, from his convictions of truth and his sense of duty to the author of that truth, and to the human family, at whose benefit it aims, changes in any respect his views of doctrine or polity in religion, and that change seems to him to involve such considerations as are important to be generally understood, that fact alone, might be sufficient apology for some public declaration of it. But where silence necessarily exposes to much misunderstanding and consequent injury, doubly enhanced is the public demand.

Such is the view--accompanied with the earnest solicitation of friends, which induces to the undertaking of the author. He reluctantly yields to what seems to be a reasonable demand of the public, and the necessities of the case, to make known thus his views of truth and duty, rather than leave them to the mercy of *mere rumor*, rumor *uninformed* among friends, and *virulent* among enemies.

If his effort should seem *presuming*, as though he pretended to be the discoverer of any *new principles*, or the originator of any *new scheme* leading to the union of the Saints—he decidedly would disclaim any such pretence. The subject has, for a long time engrossed much interest in the church, and research the most ample, as well as direct attempts not a few, have

been made for the accomplishment of the desired object. But they have rather been in sections of the church distinct from that of his sphere of labour and experience ; and, as far as he has read, have failed of reaching the end at which they aim. All that is sought, is to bring to a more successful and practical bearing truths already demonstrated.

However lightly the views taken, may be esteemed by some, they are considered, by others, worthy of public examination. To say the least, *one* has embraced them at much sacrifice of feeling, and believes, justly as he may be overlooked in the interest they are hereafter to elicit, and his imperfect attempts be superceeded by the more successful efforts of abler hands and more competent minds, they are ultimately to act a most prominent part in uniting the divided and distracted church, and ushering in the harmony and glory of the latter day.

The author is not insensible to the *delicacy*, as well as *difficulty* of his task. In addition to the native intricacy of the subject, its discussion must come in contact with such a variety of conflicting feelings, opinions and prejudices, that he will be liable to be greatly *misunderstood*, as well as *misrepresented*.— And that much grace will be necessary, in any mind, to continue a hearing ear, or a willing heart, any longer than any one's peculiar notions are, in every particular, gratified.

It may be proper to remark, that while independence and plainness will be exercised in speaking of



all opinions—as the design of the work renders indispensable; yet it has not been found necessary to single out those of any religious party as censurable, in the justification of others. The principles that come under examination are of a *general* rather than of a *seclusive* character—and rest for their support upon the Church *as a whole*, and not upon any particular denomination of it. So that while the enquiring and teachable saint will here find assistance in learning his duty, and the true policy of the Church, no food will be afforded to party pride or sectarian animosity. No weapons are to be put into the hands of one branch of the church to be wielded against another. If severity is any where employed—it levels its blow, as a kind and wise God would have it, not upon some principle peculiar and grateful to one ecclesiastical edifice, and odious and rejected of its opposite; but at the headstone in the crowning arch which connects, and *yet holds in separation* their opposite walls. If the blow is successful, it will break the strength of that arch, and leave to settle together the formidable array of religious doctrines which now stand over against and braced up by each other.

If the question is asked, what advantage can accrue from the agitation of this subject, especially as all similar attempts have heretofore failed. It is answered—The subject is assuming a new type, and coming up with new claims before the public mind. And conspiring events, belonging both to the church and the world, give strong encouragements to believe, that

the juncture is near which is to usher in the union of the saints.

It is a fact, hailed with gratitude and congratulation by every true saint, that, for some period past, there has been, silently, progressing an approximation to each other, among the different denominations of christians, in their distinctive tenets. The retaining of the indefinite phraseology of a past century, unsuited to the latitude of present religious opinions, seems to be the only very manifest distinction between the majority of their creeds.

The differences between God's people are rather *nominal* than *real*, and rest more upon *fancied* than *just* grounds. And it is equally inconsistent with the spirit of christianity, and of the age, that they should be continued, with all their baneful effects, on such slight support. That they are to be never removed, however, by the continuance of the present economy, may be seen in the fact, that an approximation to each other, in the opinions of the different denominations, *is not*, and from the nature of the case, *cannot* be attended with a corresponding increase of brotherly love and unity of interest. Observation, to any mind, will show that the nearer two parties in the church are alike in their opinions and practices, so long as they have separate organizations and occupy rival positions, the more strenuous will be their opposition and unrelenting their strife. As the different evangelical sects have been approximating to each other in their tenets, bent still, as they all are, upon coming off

masters of the field, the controversy is depending, not upon eligibility of position, dexterity of manœuvre, and skirmishing at a distance, but upon personal and deadly encounter at the edge of the sword and the point of the bayonet.

The search of the public mind, inquisitive and determined as it is, against every moral evil, after the cause of this strange phenomenon, together with the definiteness of the word of God, and the enlightening and subduing influence of his spirit, are our chief dependence in the work to which these pages are devoted.

The leading presses and pulpits of every evangelical denomination, speak loudly and confidently of the need of reform, and the prospect that encourages to it. And yet when the question is brought to a practical bearing—alike, all shrink back from its *dreaded touch*. Eloquent and devoted clergymen, when abroad from their homes, and in the congregations of promiscuously commingled saints, catching the flame of their united devotion, and universal love, seem to forget their own peculiarities, and verge, with all the brotherhood, on to the spirit and platform of millennial union. But returned to their people, and the sphere of their sectarian policy and attachments, they seem to forget the holy and benevolent emotions that had been kindled in their bosoms, and dread the promulgation and application of the very sentiments, they in a more heavenly frame of mind, had indulged, as a signal for revolution, or the torch of an incendiary.

Is it wicked to practice what it is commendable to preach? How long shall be continued this liberality of professions among the saints, without an advance to try the efficacy of an application? Is it urged that the period has not arrived for successful experiment? Was it ever *too early* to do right, or *too soon* to leave off doing wrong? And have we any reason to believe that God will leave any *well designed*, and judiciously made efforts, to fail of promoting their benevolent end? Can it be considered, then, an effort misjudged or ill timed, to endeavour to awaken an interest in the Church, which will lead it to consider the sin and consequences of scism; as long as we are all praying to be delivered from it, and all the hopes of the saints are merged in its eradication? Especially while some rational expectation can be inspired of relief—and a plan, professing to be scriptural, suggested for its removal?

“The fact cannot escape an intelligent spectator of the present critical struggle of religious parties,” says the eloquent author of *Spiritual Despotism*, “that the crown of pre-eminence hangs at the goal ready to be carried off by that party, be it which it may, that with a manly ingenuousness, and honest zeal, and a christian conscientiousness, shall undertake *its own reform*, its reform in theology, in modes of worship and in polity. There is little hazard in asserting that this prize may be won even by the least considerable of our various denominations which should resolutely strive for it; and which, while its competitors are al-

ways commending their own peculiar notions and usages and assailing those of others, should unsparingly examine *its own*, and apply boldly the remedies which good sense and scriptural principles suggest. A religious body thus acting, would quickly outstrip its rivals, would command the respect of the people at large, would draw to itself men of sense and talent from all parties, and soon would imbibe all and embrace all."

"If conjectures were admitted as to the party most likely (if any be so) now to awaken itself to this honorable ambition, the ambition of leading the way to a return to reason and genuine christianity, it would be necessary to exclude those who distinguish themselves by a loudly uttered confidence of *bring in the right*, and of *needing no reform*."

Commending his feeble but sincere attempt to the attention and prayers of all who seek the peace and honour of the Church, the author would acknowledge his entire dependence on an almighty arm to sustain him in an undertaking to which he devotes his life. Praying that it may not be his misfortune to reap division, where he seeks only union, and to see springing up, from the seeds of peace he scatters, the fruits of discord and contention. Little as he feels that the object of his attempt deserves it, however much its execution may, he expects severity from party prejudice and sectarian animosity. That he will escape condemnation with many, he has not the vanity to hope; that he will be read with jealousy by most,

he has had experience enough already to foresee. Writing, however, with an eye upon the wounds of a bleeding Church, the necessities of a perishing world, and the responsibilities of a judgment, he would leave his imperfect effort, where he would ask the reader to leave his heart, while perusing it, in the hands of God, praying that he will glorify himself in whatever his servants may be called to suffer in his blessed cause.

## CHAPTER I.

### THE PROSPECT.

In the visions of Prophecy, the Lord has revealed to his Saints the prospect of an *approaching Millennium*. Our subject leads us not into calculations of time, about when that day is to arrive, or conjectures respecting what are to be the general features of the world at that period. Such enquiries are left to more curious heads, and more competent minds. We concern ourselves only about *one feature* of the approaching scene, and that, we believe, *an early one*—in what remains of earth's grand drama. The vision of it was so delightful to Isaiah that he breaks out in rapture at the view—"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth *good tidings*, that *publisheth peace*; that saith unto Zion, thy God reigneth." And what were these *good tidings*?—the *peace of Zion*, the *unity of the Saints*. "Thy watchmen"—he continues—"shall lift up the voice, with the voice *together* shall they sing, for they shall see *eye to eye*, when the Lord shall bring again Zion."

Among our prominent sins, before God, is our faithlessness in the fulfilment of such predictions. It imposes the greatest obstacles in the way of ushering in the glorious event. We look with mere human eyes upon the mighty difficulties to be surmounted. We gaze with despair upon the diversity of views, the jealousy of feeling and clashing of interests among

different sects, and calculate results as they must legitimately follow from such distracting causes. But we are encouraged and bound to look beyond these objects of sense in tracing out the destiny and prospects of the Church. When we think of the depravity of the human heart, in which this kingdom is to be set up, we must remember likewise the subduing and converting power of the Holy Ghost. And when we look on the divisions and jealousies which distract the body of the Saints, we should call to mind also the enlightening and subduing influence of the word developing its power, upon a willing, obedient and prayerful mind. And last, though not least, the conspiring testimony of Prophecy, and the signs of the times exhibiting *the certainty of the event*; the *inevitable* and *speedy termination of all divisions among God's people*. The Church of our day has an important part to act in the gaining of this object; but the low views we have indulged, and the faint hopes cherished, of what God has promised, have greatly conspired to unfit us for it. Let the saints but open their eyes upon the prospect, and God will spread before them, in the visions of faith, views that will banish doubt, and fire them with ardour suited to the achievement of so glorious a result.

But we must look at the evidence which sustains our hopes, and encourages to an effort:—

1. The union of the saints is the next great event in the order of the fulfilment of prophecy. God, by his prophets has clearly marked out the prominent events connected with the advancement of his earthly kingdom. They travel down through the whole field of earth's history, marking the rise and fall of empires, and the conquests and defeats of kings, till the supremacy of earthly potentates shall cease, and the balance of temporal power, settle in the scale of



Evangelical principles and religious truth; political supremacy having yielded to the government of enlightened christian sentiment—which, as *the sceptre of Immanuel*—shall sway the whole earth.

According to approved Commentators, we find that every distinguished conqueror has had his measure of success meted out to him, in prophetic prediction, even down to Napoleon of France—whose footsteps may yet be traced in blood across the continent of Europe. But let us here observe, he is the last of the number noticed in Revelation. He served the purpose of his existence, in breaking the chain of the Popish power, removing the spell of superstitious intolerance, and opening the gates of political and religious liberty upon the world. And next follows the kingdom of the Messiah in its supremacy. The *stone* which Daniel, in his vision, beheld “cut out of the mountain without hands”—now rolls up its formidable bulk, acquires a momentum which is irresistible, and shows itself destined speedily to “fill the whole earth.” Let us notice also a prediction concerning ecclesiastical power. In the seventeenth chapter of Revelation, God has represented the fall of Antichrist in the destruction of the Popish power. He had in that connexion traced it through all the stages of its existence, and now represents it *as waning to its extinction*. The Roman power is represented, as “The great whore that sitteth upon many waters”—and here of “a woman sitting upon a scarlet coloured beast,” representing *the Pope’s political power*, and the beast “had ten horns” representing the ten Kingdoms of Europe—which sprung up out of the dismembered fragments of the Roman Empire,—and through all Europe’s mighty revolutions, because God has had a purpose prophetic to secure by it, have continued to this day. And now look at the prediction. “*And*

*the ten horns* which thou sawest, these shall hate the woman, and make her *desolate* and *naked*, and shall eat her flesh and burn her with fire." How is this prediction fulfilling? Have these ten Kingdoms began to hate the woman and waste and devour her? England long since withdrew her revenues, France devoured her, Germany, Russia, and more lately Spain and Portugal have joined the insurgents, and other powers seem to hold but a faint allegiance. And now, at the conclusion of this scene represented to the Revelator John, the fall of the papal power, voices of multitudes in heaven were heard, like the sound of great waters and mighty thunderings crying "Allelujah, for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth. Let us rejoice and be glad, and give honor to him, for *the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his wife, (the Church,) hath made herself ready.*"

2. This event is betokened in the connexion necessarily existing between it and others which are to succeed. We are cherishing reasonably fond expectations of the rapid spread and general diffusion of the Gospel. That not only the knowledge of God, but the converting and sanctifying power of his Spirit, is soon to fill the whole world. But are the influences which flow from the present divided and distracted Church such as promise the accomplishment of this? The conversion of the Heathen world God has made to depend upon the resources and prayers of his Saints. Funds must be provided to give the Bible and the living preacher to every benighted Pagan upon earth, and then God is to give salvation in answer to the *united* and *believing* prayers of his people. Let us not be taken as joining hands with opposers and sceptics about missionary operations, but as admitting, as friends, what the world knows to be true. That with the best economy of a *divided Church*, it

takes a great supply of funds to do what comparatively *little* might accomplish were God's people *one*. So circuitous and consuming is now the channel of benevolence, and divided into many and distinct courses, that a great fountain head is needed to enable each to pour *one refreshing drop* upon the distant moral desert at whose benefit it aims. God, nor the prospect he has revealed, will long admit such unavoidable prodigality, in so holy and promising an enterprise.\* But this is only *a part* of what is important here. Does God regard the heart? Has he respect to the motives which prompt, and the spirit indulged, in our alms and prayers? Who can estimate, but Him whose eye is omniscient, the sinister spirit and unhallowed desires which corrupt the offerings and render offensive the petitions of many ostensibly engaged in the conversion of the world? And yet ere this victory can be achieved, that God, whose pure eye scans the moral emotions of every bosom, will require that the hearts of the saints be *single*, and their importunities *one*.

But ere the millennial day can dawn, there is equally as great a work to be done at home. To suppress every form of vice, to overthrow every system of oppression, to bring to light, and put away from the people, every hidden abomination; and, in short, to give divine truth, and correct moral principle their reception, and effectual influence upon every mind, bringing all but the incorrigible under Heaven's concentrated power and mercy, to the penitent's place at the foot of the cross.

\*Divisions in benevolent operations have their origin in the Church, and spring from the same causes which originate disunion in that body. Hence the remedy for both is the same. And the removal of the source of the one, will do away likewise the support of the other.

And are the influences of truth through its delegated agent, the Church, such as promise to secure this result, in its present divided state? Is the heart of the Church, to speak of only *one feature* of what is expected to be brought in, sufficiently *at peace* to make the streams which issue therefrom peaceful enough to calm perfectly to rest this turbulent world. So that, as predicted—"The wolf shall feed with the lamb and the Lion shall eat straw like the ox," and there shall be nothing to disturb in all God's holy mountain. Says a late author,\* in regard to this—"The christian Church is a house divided against itself. There, where we might have looked for the sepulchre of all the evil passions, we find their rendezvous and their home. Political governments, it is said, are tired of war; but that divine institution which should have been known as *the peace maker of the world*, gives signs of continuing to distinguish itself by conflict, though all the world were at peace." And what, in other respects, does it promise suited to what is expected in the latter days. Behold prejudice and party ambition putting their trammels on all its struggling efforts; cooling its zeal, or rendering unhallowed its fire; tainting its benevolence, so that it comes up before God as an offence; crippling in the dust its energies, so that they can achieve comparatively nothing in the community; and making all its mightiest attempts, those which ought to be felt to the utmost limits of the world, to only effervesce for a moment among those who make them, and then die down in the circle where they are agitated. Here is *truth*, the *magazine* of *God's moral power*, rendered ineffectual by the devices of men; and that too in the very hands of its delegated employers, christians, to

\*Rev. John Harris.

whom the promise is made that mountains shall melt away before them, *wielding truth by faith*; and the Church, against which "the gates of hell shall not prevail." It is appointed of heaven to subvert all error in the earth, to subdue the dominion of sin, and purify, and bring back a lost world to God. And, let it ring in the ears of the stupid and party enslaved Church, that *it will secure its object*. "My word shall not return unto me void, but accomplish that whereunto it is sent." We would say to the prevailing denominations, as Mordecai answered Esther, "For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to Israel *from another place*; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed; and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

3. These facts are laying, *not without influence*, on the minds of those who love and long for Christ's appearing. As it were, by some divine impulse, the saints are becoming aroused to their real condition and obligations. They discover that they are sacredly obligated by the considerations of brotherly love, benevolence to a perishing world, and the demands of truth, to walk unitedly with *all the saints* on the platform of revealed and spiritually attested truth. It is discovered to be, not our misfortune, but our crime, that we are divided and at variance. It is not strange then, that party ambition relaxes its grasp, denominational bands seem ready to burst asunder, and lines of distinction already are beginning to be run only where God has run them in the Bible, between *those that love him* and those that *love him not*. The sanctified host of the Messiah already beginning to be drawn out, with entrenchments no longer arrayed against each other, but presenting one bold and uni-

ted front against the scattering and discomfited host of all their enemies.

4. All true saints tend to each other in their sentiments, feelings and interests. What strong affinity always exists between the minds of young converts ! They are always "*of one heart and one mind.*" And the bible is ever found a very ineffectual means of dividing them. Nay more, it always, taking their experience as evidence, utters and executes its curse upon a division when formed. And is it not questionable whether, if the people of God in the different sects, should become, as we believe they are many of them already becoming, self-sacrificing in spirit, obedient in heart and perfectly submissive in will, and then looking upon the claims of the world for a union among the saints, by prayer that secures the divine influence enquire after duty, and sink into the discharge of it, with all the heart, whether they would not float together into one channel, and move on harmoniously in the way to heaven. Things are evidently ripening to this result. The spiritual and devoted in the different churches, tend to each other like the different streams upon opposite declivities; their course is *to the valley between*, and the *quiet current* that rolls through it, *in peace*, to the ocean.

5. The Bible is *a unit* in its doctrines and requirements. This may seem an unnecessary assertion. The idea is generally admitted, and comment upon it may appear useless. But it has an important connexion with the subject, after all we have now stated. It removes the last prop from the tottering temple of error we are laboring to demolish. It has been a prevalent idea that the foundation of church divisions was laid in the bible. That, by ambiguity or obscurity of meaning, it fostered differences of opinion, out of which scism has arisen. Such an opinion, however, is

*delusive.* God's requirements are plain; and if we would take *what is revealed*, and be satisfied with *this alone*, seeking with a single eye and obedient heart, the teachings of the Spirit, we could neither split into factions, nor tolerate their continuance.

6. The Spirit's influence is *never contradictory* in different minds. Men are learning to prize higher and follow more sacredly than formerly the divine influence. It is no longer, to the true saint, an incomprehensible, mysterious, and unknown agent, of which the bible, speaks, and christians speculate without, to any great extent, seriously attempting to know experimentally of its power. It is found to be, by the devoted soul, what Christ promised, its everlasting comforter and unerring guide; it is to *abide* with the saint *forever*, and *lead him into all truth*. So that the inevitable result, if christian's obey the dictates of the Spirit, will be, to unite them in the sentiments and bonds of the Gospel.

7. The repellent influences of converted and unconverted minds in the Church will greatly conspire to this result. It is a fact, that even Charity does not require should be concealed, that a large class of those nominally professors of piety have *never been born again*. They have *no spiritual discernment*, their fruits are not *the fruits of love*, and their fellowship is with *the world*, rather than with Christ and his cause. On this account it happens, that to seek high attainments in godliness, is so ungrateful to their own minds, and so much a matter of reflection to them in others. And to open many a page of what God has taught, is to bring out that, to them, peculiarly offensive. They come not to the light, they fear the searching blaze of eternal truth, and stand ready, with a sympathetic heart, to hold up a curtain of caution between its piercing rays and the countenances of an

ungodly world. On this account when the preaching of the gospel does its office work, *the reproof of sin*, or is adapted to encourage or exhort those who seek to obey God with a pure heart, it finds in such minds the greatest hostility. The result, is, in the Church, that *what is one man's meat is another one's poison*. Such causes will rend asunder the, *in heart divided Church*, and kindred spirits, from every quarter, *cluster together*, according to the opposite attractions of godliness, and impiety. But this result will not be realized only as prejudice, will, and selfish and party ambition, are consumed out of the heart of the truly spiritual, and they float, without resistance, in the channel of truth and the Spirit's influence.

8. The demands of the world will be *loud and imperative* for the union of christians. They reasonably hold our disunion to be a libel upon us and our cause. Unmindful, as we may be, of the principles on which it is to be secured, they are not ignorant of them. They understand divinity enough to see, that if the Bible is a *unit*, as it professes to be, and we pretend for it, and the Spirit, given freely to all saints, is *never contradictory* in its influence, either we are hypocrites in pretending to piety, or shamefully negligent of the Divine Comforter. In either case, our divisions, as saints, seem to them unnecessary and criminal. They understand full well the real foundation of our divisions, and hence their frequent and keenest rebukes. They will answer our calls upon them to repent and embrace the Gospel, with such searching replies, and stand back from our holiest efforts for their conversion, so strenuously, viewing them as snares for party, that we shall be under the necessity of turning to follow the just injunction—"Physician heal thyself."



9. Union will grow out of *the necessities of the case*. The spiritual and obedient are already being thrown, by opposition from formalists and sinners on the one hand, and the influence of love and the Spirit of God on the other, into a union of prayer and labour that is far more strong in its bands than can be denominational cords, which necessarily hang *but feebly* around such hearts. They are dead to the vain ambition that inspires the mere formalist and sectarian in religion, and wholly devoted to the good of souls. In this frame of mind they are prepared to contemplate the sin and evils of scism, and learn its influence upon the christian's heart. And while they persevere in duty, they will wash their hands of it as individuals. And God gives the seal of his approbation to their decision and labors. A revival is always enjoyed among such people; and around them will gather anxious enquirers and young converts. Here is the *expectation* of the one, and *the home* of the other. And with all else that may be thrown out in other places to attract, it will there be manifest that the sceptre of salvation has departed from them, and the glory of God escaped from their sanctuary. So that all those who once assume this position will be confirmed in the duty and enjoyment of continuing there, and those doubting and opposing, if true saints, will be constrained to yield to the decisions of heaven.

Encouraged by such a prospect, we are induced to make further enquiries calculated to throw light upon the duty of individuals and churches in regard to a great religious revolution which we believe is at hand. Every great change through which God has led either the intellectual or religious world, has originated in the *extremities of a crisis*. Events, for a long period, have conspired, sometimes apparent, and sometimes concealed, to the wisely directed issue. At

length the appointed juncture arrives. 'Things hardly a day previous impracticable move off almost spontaneously—and a Luther bids defiance to the authority of the Pope, at whose nod, but a day before, a world bowed in trembling submission, and burning bulls, edicts, and sentences of condemnation at his feet, carries the torch of reformation blazing over a continent. Are not events evidently converging now to such a crisis? And how far are we from its issue?

Let us be upon the watchtower of observation, as well as prepared individually for our responsibility, for God is about to "bring again Zion" from her sectarian captivity—preparing her watchmen to "lift up their voices together" and "see eye to eye." As they stand upon her burnished bulwarks, reflecting on every side the light and glory of God's presence,—eye shall meet eye from every position:—and not a discord break the harmony of their sentiments, or the melody of their songs. Before leaving this branch of the subject, a few remarks will be deemed appropriate respecting the probable ground on which union will be effected.

1. It will not be in *the mercenary bartering away*, for peace, of one's *honest sentiments*. Any such compromise will always be defeated in its design. Here is the secret, indeed, of most of those failures which have heretofore accrued in seeking union among God's people. One christian has bought off another from a position he held sacred, but which was obnoxious to himself, by bartering away some sentiment of his own. By such an attempt, however honestly made, violence is done to the truth, and the Holy Spirit is grieved. So that the prevalence of true piety will always weaken such union, while that which is true is ever strengthened by it.

The true platform of union will be found one on

which the saints may all stand, and each individual, in the fear of God, practice and faithfully sustain, (if he does it in love,) all he believes the bible enjoins, maintaining "a conscience void of offence." And this without a jar in the harmony of the brotherhood.

2. Neither will it probably be in the *universal adoption* of the *distinctive peculiarities of any religious sect*. No opportunity will be afforded, in the millennial day, for one party in the Church to boast itself over its subdued rivals, and triumph in the success of its sectarian schemes. As declared the prophet Jeremiah, "In those days, and in that time, the children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah *together, going and weeping*; they shall go and seek the Lord. They shall ask the way to Zion, with their faces thitherward, saying come and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten." Thus the different tribes of spiritual Israel will go and *weep apart* for their own errors, and in shame for themselves, forget the long complained of wanderings of their rivals.

3 It is to be expected, that to the mortification of all pride of sect, and the humbling of every spiritual tyrant in the dust, Zion's King at his coming, will call every religious sect from its *entrenched position*. The reason is obvious—"That no flesh should glory in his presence." To attempt prescribing the means by which He is to bring about this result, is out of the way of our object, and beyond our desire. If conjecture may be indulged in respect to it, it is highly probable that some error of principle common to all denominations, and beyond the latitude of the ordinary field of controversy, will be discovered, alike overlooked at present, by all, the correction of which will remove the barriers to union, and the incitements to strife, which now divide and distract the Church, and

leave all standing together upon the *one only true foundation*.

4. But the union of the saints is never to be secured, by the indulgence of that *looseness of sentiment*, and indifference of moral feeling, which turns religious liberty into licentiousness. It is vain for the friends of christian union to think of prevailing upon the established churches of the land, confirmed as they are in the doctrines of the cross, and surrounded by every species of error, insinuating and plausible in the garb it assumes, and the professions it makes—but baneful and deadly in its effects—to treat as indifferent the opinions men cherish. They may be persuaded to forbear with weakness of faith in a brother, who is misguided on some point of doctrine or duty that does not conflict with vital principles; but to make religion to consist in a mere external observance of gospel duties, and perhaps a profession of an internal change founded on some vague ideas of christian experience, *irrespective of doctrinal views*, is too irrational and unpromising to secure general confidence or sanction. Such an attempt will meet the minds of all who would fain be called christians, and yet it is seriously to be feared, have never been spiritually begotten into that character; but never can be approved by the great family of the faithful, who watch for the *purity* as well as unity of the saints. It will much better serve the purpose of an alliance with the world, than to cement together the broken fragments of the body of Christ. No idea can be more absurd than that which contemplates *piety*, as *independent of opinion*. The new birth is no more essential to recognition in the Church, than the truths which beget in the mind the emotions and resolutions connected with it.

## CHAPTER II.

OF THE CHURCH;—ITS TRUE LIMITS;—AND THE  
NATURE AND OBLIGATIONS OF UNION PRE-  
SCRIBED IN SCRIPTURE.

As the foundation of division among the saints is laid in the views entertained, by different parties, of the scripture limits of *the Church*, and what constitutes and consists with membership in it, this inquiry will demand special attention.

The term Church, (*ecclesia*) when it occurs in scripture, and is used as a religious appellation, either has a universal or catholic sense, (as it is termed) implying the *entire body* of the redeemed; or in a specific or particular sense, having reference to a *part* of that body associated together in some designated place. In the former sense it is employed where Christ addressed Peter, saying “Upon this rock will I build my Church and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it.” And again, when he is spoken of as being “Head over all things to the Church, which is *his body*.” In such passages the whole redeemed family is contemplated—the universal body of the saints that shall finally be gathered into his kingdom. In the latter or restricted sense, it is used, when mention is made of the saints in any particular place, as the Church at Antioch, at Corinth or Rome. By this, it will clearly appear that it is never a distinction of *peculiarity* among christians, but simply of the characteristic of piety, that which designated them from all the unregenerate as “a peculiar people.” When employed in its absolute form it is obvious that it nev-

er was made a distinction narrower than christian character. The sacred inclosure it circumscribed was of the same dimensions as the fold of Christ's sheep. It drew the line of holy discrimination between the world and all those around whom Jesus had thrown the arms of his divine compassion, clasping them to his bosom as his converted children. When it denoted a particular body of believers, it is equally manifest, that it designated all the christians of the place after which the local Church was named. The *particular Church* differed from the universal one, only as *a part* differs from *the whole*. To make sure this understanding of the case, the inspired writers frequently drop the collective term, Church, in their Epistles and insert as synonymous, the phrases, "To all beloved of the Lord." "To such as are in Christ Jesus." "To them called to be saints." Or, if we adopt another method of argument, we are led directly to the same conclusion. The term Church originally denotes, simply an *assembly*, and applied to a religious association, *an assembly of Christians*. And as numerical addition of individuals of the same character cannot change the nature of the society which is augmented thereby, in the same way as a collection of men constitute *an assembly* or *Church*, in the primary import of the term, so an association of christians make up *a true Church*, in the sacred sense of the same term.

The Church is affirmed to be Christ's body, and all christians are agreed that we are united to Christ by faith, as saith the Apostle "we are all baptised by one Spirit into one body." Now how can there be a class of persons who are strictly united to Christ, and yet not component parts of his spiritual body?

That some christians have not professed, by a public rite, that union to Christ, there is no doubt; but

can it rationally be urged, that delinquency, in regard to a profession of that union, nulifies the union itself, which ought to have been professed.

From these remarks it must be seen, that the identity of a Church, or of an individual's membership in it, depends not upon any ceremonial observance required in scripture, or upon any distinctive tenets, which may be cherished and professed, which enter not essentially into the elements which beget saving faith. The only indispensable elements of a Church's existence are:—first, *Members*—these give it body. Second, *Piety*—this makes it *Christian*—gives to it its moral distinction. Third, *covenant or association*—which imparts to it sustaining and governing power. Ordinances, profession of faith, and assent to rules of discipline may enter into its constitution, and by divine appointment; but they form not its distinguishing features, and therefore their defection cannot annul the being, or destroy the character of a christian Church.

To deny this truth is to dissent from the principles on which is founded every protestant Church. It is much more in keeping with the pretensions of the Roman See, than the true spirit of Dissenters to unchurch all, however pious and approved of God, who have not been organized by the divine right of Bishops, and in the Holy Catholic forms.

If any thing more need be urged to substantiate what is affirmed of the import of the gospel term Church, and the true limits of the community which it designates, and the fellowship it requires, reference may be had to what is now to be said of the union required among its members.

Christ delights to associate himself with the Church as *its Husband*. 'I am married unto you,' is his affectionate declaration. His object evidently is, to pre-

figure the unity required among the saints, by the oneness of the institution of matrimony. As the husband can lawfully sustain that relation but to one cotemporary wife, whose affections, interest and service are single to himself, in the same sense the Church is "espoused to one husband, she is "the bride the Lamb's wife."

The same relation he frequently saw fit to set forth in the simile of *brotherhood*. He took upon himself for this purpose our nature; and speaking of the Deity, in this humiliation, he styles him 'my father and your father.' And Paul affirms, evidently having his mind upon the same idea, "Both he that sanctifieth and they that are sanctified are *all of one*, for which cause he is not ashamed to call them *brethren*; saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the Church will I sing praise unto thee"\* The sentiment here exhibited is, that christians, with himself, have one common paternal head, not only as the source from which they derive spiritual being, but a unity of character, "being changed," by regeneration, "into the same image;" and of interest, their life being "hid with Christ in God" i. e. Saints in Christ so merge their very being in God as to render their conduct, purposes, and even emotions identified with his. There is one unbroken harmony of spirit, design and execution, extending from the mind of the Eternal Father down through his "*whole family* in heaven and on earth."

Christ also associated his disciples with each other in this endearing capacity, accompanying the most earnest exhortation to mutual affection and forbearance with the declaration "*all ye* are brethren." And he exhibited the inseparable connection which

\*Heb. 2: 11. 12.



subsisted between them, affirming "I am the vine, ye are the branches." He also made the maintainance of the bond of brotherhood unimpaired the strongest proof of their discipleship. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one toward another." Individuals, confounded in their scepticism, by a view of the concord prevalent among the saints, were to exclaim "Behold how these brethren love one another."

During our Saviour's continuance with the Church which he reared, he was unremitting in enjoining upon it union and forbearance. And as he was about to go away to his father and their father, concord among his disciples seemed to have been the burden of his farewell prayer. 'Neither pray I for these alone,' he cries, but for *all* that shall believe on me through their word.' Wide as were the arms of his compassion, encircling all who should ever be redeemed, equally extended was the scope of his prayer. And what did he supplicate for them as his most important and dying request. 'That they *all may be one*?'—and that no partial union, but a perfect oneness, like that subsisting in the Godhead—"even as we (the Father and Son) are one."\* In the Acts of the Apostles we find the multitude of those converted, although from so many nations, possessing each its peculiar and strong prejudices, diverse sentiments and clashing feelings, all coalesce in the embracing of christianity. They were "of one heart and one soul." They welcomed each other freely and heartily into the sacred bond of the Church, irrespective of national prejudices and peculiarities of custom and opinion, as "fellow citizens of the saints, and of the household of God."

\* John 17: 21.

The great object of Paul's masterly argument in the Epistle to the Romans was, to show the Jew and Gentile christians, who, with different and conflicting views and practices, were associated in the same church, that they formed but "one body in Christ." That, the whole multitude of the redeemed God had adopted into one spiritual family, with a unity of affection and interest, with which such a relation only consists, and without which it is sundered at once.

In the address of this same Apostle to the Corinthians, we find, in the first chapter, a severe accusation brought against them, that they, in the diversity of sentiment and practice which prevailed in the Church, did not pursue the gospel course and act in a christian spirit. And in what did their fault consist? In the fact that they were too forbearing with those who appeared to them to have deviated from the right course and seemed to have departed from Gospel order? No. But in that there were contentions among them, and 'envyings and strife and divisions.' And he infers at once, from such fruits, that they were carnal, and walked as men. And what is the remedy which he prescribes for the security of peace? Is it that each should separate himself from all whom he considered as unscriptural in any doctrine or practice? Did he exhort them to separate into distinct and rival factions? He exclaims, 'Is Christ divided, that every one of you saith I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ!' He informs them that 'by *one Spirit* we are all baptised into *one body*, and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.' At conversion, all saints drink into the same Spirit, and are baptised by the Holy Ghost into Christ's one spiritual body. And, to make this truth beautifully and forcibly plain, he employs, by way of illustration, the figure of the harmonious con-

nection, in sympathy and office, of the different members of the human system. 'For as the body is one, and hath many members, and *all* the members of that one body, being many, are *one body*; so also is Christ.' i. e. Christ in the community of his saints.\* And the inference he draws is peculiarly pointed and instructive. 'If the foot shall say, because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?' And, he might have added—If the hand shall say to the foot, because thou art not a hand, thou art not of the body, is it therefore not of the body?—And he urges most forcibly, from this truth, so clearly illustrated 'That there should be no scism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another' as have the members of the natural body. For, as in the case of his comparison, 'Whether one member suffer all the members suffer with it, or one member be honored all the members rejoice with it.'† And, as if determined to leave no chance for mistake about the application of this scripture, he now, in conclusion, introduces again the term 'body of Christ' which, he had already shown, was formed of all who were regenerated, or baptised into that body by the *one Spirit*, and declares 'Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.'

The same truth is exhibited, in every variety of expression, in the succeeding epistles. And no object is more prominent with the sacred writers, than the maintaining in the Church, of the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.' Christ is set forth as the 'all and in all' to his people, and the whole body of believers as 'knit together, by joints and bands,' in a manner 'as every joint supplieth,' and thus 'having nourishment, ministering' each member to the good

\*1 Cor. 12. 12, and 15. †1 Cor. 12: 25, 26, and 27.

of its associate, and, by this means, 'increasing more and more.'

Any tendency to disunion among the saints is always severely reproved, and where the blessing of peace and concord was enjoyed to such a degree that the Apostle could affirm, 'concerning brotherly love have *no need* that I write unto you,' he exhorts that in it, they increase and abound yet *more and more.*' And this same epistle he finally closes with this heavenly benediction:—'Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace, *always*, by all means.'

In Revelation the Church is exhibited always as *One*. One in her conflicts and one in her triumphs. At one time she is represented as 'the woman' fleeing into the wilderness from persecution. At another as 'a camp' intrenched against her enemies. She has but one heart, one centre of affection and submission, one Captain of her salvation, and one eternal and common home. One cry of distress arises from all her countless host, when slaughter overtakes her; and one harmonious song of triumph, also, when victory perches upon her banner. At the approach of the Bridegroom she appears as 'the Bride adorned for her Husband;' and in the possession of his kingdom, she is seated with him on his throne as 'the Lamb's wife.'

That separate organizations among the saints, each erecting its distinct standard setting at naught those of others, and claiming to itself exclusively the titles and prerogatives of 'the Church,' is contrary to the will of God, and subversive of the design of the great Captain of our salvation, is, from such scripture authority, most evident. Who have been the aggressors in the matter—upon whom rests the responsibility of dividing thus 'the body of Christ,' it is now too late, and fruitless to enquire. It is evidently one of

the dark shades throne upon the Church by the gloomy clouds that covered the religious hemisphere in the middle ages. The spirit of secession originated in the justly obnoxious corruptions of a loose and tyrannical religious establishment; one whose last peculiarity, that could be discovered, was, that with 'the form,' it retained a sprinkling even, of 'the power of godliness.' It was from such the early reformers *separated themselves*. It was a resort justifiable in an emergency when it had become too late to apply the scriptural rules of discipline and excision. That power had, by a wicked delay, departed from their hands; and their only remaining alternative was, to 'come out from among them, that they be not partakers of their sins.' The crime of all secession is, not in separation from that which has become incorrigibly corrupt, but in not having kept continually the remedial salt within the fountain, to save it from impurity.

The Church has now only to do with the future. 'Forgetting those things which are behind' we should press forward to the field of party strife, not for the deadly and decisive encounter, to see who is to come off master in the contest; but to present a flag of truce, to seek a general amnesty, to ascertain, if possible, what are real matters of dispute, and proclaim perpetual union on the principles of *the Prince of Peace*. Thus shall the sanctified host of the redeemed, marshalled in gospel panoply, be prepared to go forward to the conquest of the world.

But it may be necessary to exhibit, in a more definite manner, the nature of that union which the gospel enjoins. That it was cemented by the strongest fraternal affection, it has already been shown, and limited only by the bounds of the whole 'household of faith.' The degree of mutual attachment was meas-

ured only by the love of Christ for his people. 'Ye ought,' saith the Saviour, 'to love one another even as I also have loved you.' That it was characterised by mutual forbearance, and forgiveness of injuries, appears from the whole spirit and tenure of instruction given by Christ and his Apostles. They were required to 'forgive others their tresspasses,' on the principles, and to the degree that 'Christ had forgiven them.' It was to be with a patience that an offence 'seventy times seven' repeated did not tire. And, to make doubly sure its exercise the Saviour makes his children's success, in obtaining forgiveness of him, dependent on their forgiveness of others. A part of their petition was to constantly be 'Forgive us our debts even as we forgive our debtors.' Emulation, and every other passion which could possibly make division among brethren, was most severely rebuked. Behold the severity of Christ's reply to the aspiring spirit of the two sons of Zebudee. And also the pertinence of his answer when the enquiry again arose among the disciples which of them should be the greatest. The Lord of Glory folds in his arms a helpless babe, as a befitting emblem of that humility indispensable to a disciple. If a brother erred or wandered, he was to be sought after, and fostered and reclaimed each brother laboring under the consideration of himself, 'lest he also be tempted.' Neither was effort to cease for his restoration with the failure of all human strength. By prayer, they were to go to God, and enlist for him thus the agency of an almighty hand.

But to what was this leniency and forbearance to extend? To mere matters of conduct? or to those of opinion likewise? Behold the example of the Saviour on this point. How patiently he bore with his disciples in their doubts and blindness about the plainest

truths he inculcated ! When they were hardly surpassed by the Pharisees themselves in being 'slow of heart to believe all the Scriptures had said concerning him' and his mission, remaining, even to the hour of his crucifixion, ignorant of the nature of his kingdom, and the death he should die; he patiently repeats these lessons of the prophets to them, and adds the plainest declarations of the truth; setting before them again and again, while he remained, the uncomprehended mystery. No word of complaint even falls from his lips. The only language he uttered at their stupidity, was that simple surprise—"Wherefore dost thou doubt?"

Where the hour of his crucifixion drew near, and one of the twelve was leading toward the garden of Gethsemane a band of ruffians, that he might betray his master to them with a kiss, what are the circumstances in which we find him? Eight of those who had been the constant companions of his ministry were left behind, because, with all their light, they were not prepared to understand the mystery of his agony. The atonement was yet to them utterly beyond comprehension. And *the beloved Three*, those admitted upon the mount of transfiguration, and to all his secret councils, have such *stupid hearts*, as well as *blinded minds*, as to have no sympathy with him in the agonies of that hour. He could cast himself upon the ground, and cry to his father, whose face also was turned away from him, and tread the winepress of Divine Justice alone and yet *these disciples slept*—yea, being thrice awaked, and admonished to watch with him, *they slept*. And does he upbraid them, or cast them off? No. His language is that of the tenderest apology. "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Behold him also, after his resurrection, humoring the most inexcusable unbelief in a doubting disciple.

Thomas had determined to be a disbeliever even to the utmost limit of scepticism. And yet the blessed Redeemer stretches out his wounded hands and unbosoms his lacerated side to his doubting finger. What can be considered, by christians, the limit of indulgence and forbearance with *weakness of faith*, in an acknowledged saint, with such an example before them in their Divine Master.

The Apostles went down from Mount Olivet, where he bade them adieu, their minds deeply imbued with the same Spirit. So that, when the Holy Ghost descended on the day of Pentecost, and converted the three thousand, although they were of so many nations, actuated by such different prejudices, and bound to such a variety of contradictory customs, they all coalesced together, in that common bond, where there was "neither Jew nor Greek, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free," but all were "one in Christ." We read they "were all of one heart and one soul."

Charity and mutual forbearance still continued the crowning grace of Apostolic religion. And it was no more marked when it was exercised toward a *fault of heart*, than an *error of head*. When God, by the instrumentality of Peter and other Apostles, had "granted repentance unto life" to the Gentiles—and they, without circumcision, proposed themselves to the fellowship of the church, many of the brethren felt it to be indispensable that they follow the established custom with Gentile proselytes, and submit to the rite of circumcision.\* Especially at Antioch the Church was disturbed with this question. The Jewish con-

\* The enquiry is suggested whether they had not more *inferential proof* for such a requirement than now sustains customs on which christians are far more strenuous than were these noble hearted Jews.



verts generally, held still to the right of circumcision as indispensable to connexion with the Church.\*—It was plainly taught as such under the old dispensation, and the Saviour had not directly abrogated it. His silence seemed to them to imply that it was to be continued. They also still retained a partiality for Jewish customs, in other particulars, while the Gentiles set aside the whole. At length the controversy waxed so warm that it was determined to hold a grand council at Jerusalem concerning this matter. *The unity of the Church* seemed to be the great and worthy end of this first deliberative religious assembly. And most piously did they strive for it. They found upon examination, that the question rested upon counter prepossessions and prejudices, rather than upon any thing definitely revealed; and therefore that the continuance or omission of Jewish rites, was to be left to the consciences of individual christians. They waved the question of abstract right or wrong; since there was no hope of an agreement, immediately, in regard to it, and each was confident that, time, and study, and prayer, (if means were used to keep prejudice from blinding their eyes, and controversy from rendering stubborn their wills,) would the most

\* It is an interesting fact, that this division of sentiment, on the necessity or indifference of the right of circumcision to becoming connected with the Church, continued, *without division*, among the early christians—‘Till’ says Jeremy Taylor ‘fifteen bishops in succession were circumcised; even till the destruction of Jerusalem, God seemed to have tolerated them in the error till time, and a continual dropping of the lessons and dictates apostolical did *wear it out*. ‘And in the descent of so many years, I find’ says the same author ‘not a single anathema passed upon any one of the Bishops of Jerusalem or the believers of the circumcision. And yet it was a point as clearly determined as any of those questions which now vex and crucify christendom.’

effectually and correctly solve it in the Church.— They resolved that they would write to the Gentile christians an epistle, “laying upon them *no greater burden than these necessary things.*” The Jews had yielded their prejudices, and decided on welcoming to common fellowship, all saints. They extended a cordial hand to their Gentile brethren, as “fellow citizens of the saints and of the household of God, and it was now “necessary” as well as becoming, that they make some sacrifice to maintain the bond of brotherhood. They were therefore exhorted in connection with some things, in themselves, essentially wicked, to “abstain from meats offered to idols, and things strangled and from blood.” This they were to do with reference purely to the feelings of their Jewish brethren. A precedent is here established which is worthy of the prayerful consideration of every friend of Zion. Paul was among the members of this council, and an advocate for the measure, as well as one to set his hand to the Epistle certifying their decision. And yet, in the very next chapter, another equally instructive, and to some, anomalous lesson is taught.— This same Apostle comes to Lystra and there finds a certain worthy disciple named Timotheus, “and because of the Jews,” the church there being mostly of the circumcision, he circumcised him with his own hand. The Apostle had no interest in thus tolerating a custom he knew intrinsically null and void, but to save the consciences of his weaker brethren, and promote the unity of the church. He viewed such a course to be consistent both with the Spirit of the Gospel he preached, and the dictates of sound reason about the best means of securing the eradication of that very evil, he, for a time, was *willing to tolerate.*

Paul also, as he came to Jerusalem on a visit to confer there with his brethren on the interest of the

cause, when he became an object of jealousy to his countrymen, to avoid that jealousy, and *restore peace*, entered into the temple and went through all the tedious, and to him unmeaning ceremonies of purification. Giving certainly not much encouragement to a false fastidiousness, which has to a great extent prevailed among his successors. The whole life and labours of Paul were characterised by this same catholic spirit. "Unto a Jew," says he to the Corinthians, "became I a Jew, that I might gain the Jews. To them that are under the law, as under the law that I might gain them that are under the law. To them that are without law, as without law, (not being without law to God, but under the law to Christ) that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak. I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some." Such is the portraiture Paul gives of his own liberality. And it is worthy of him, and of the corresponding instructions he imparted to the churches.

The Romans and Corinthians, to whom he addressed his leading epistles, were evidently more divided in sentiment, and troubled by deep rooted and opposite prejudices, than the evangelical christians, in different denominations, of any ordinary modern community. And the subjects of their different opinions, if possible, were more delicate in their bearing upon idol customs and sensitive consciences, than those on which saints now differ. It would seem, were it not for the *great law of love* which ruled in their bosoms, that unity with them was impossible. And how does Paul deal with their divisions? Does he admonish them to withdraw into distinct or rival factions? Does he draw the line of *abstract right* through the subjects of their contentions, and thus sever from those

most strict and correct, in some observances, those perhaps equally so in others, and thus cut in twain the *bleeding heart of the Church*? Does he even intimate that good could come out of a separation? No. His whole aim is *union*. And he sought that, not by interposing his authority to settle the disputed questions, but by inculcating lessons of mutual forbearance. "Ye that are *strong*," says he, "ought to bear the infirmities of the *weak*," and not *to please yourselves*" The adjectives *weak* and *strong*, in this connection, have reference to being *established* or *stumbled* in doctrine. So that the requirement aims to lead one, confident in the correctness of his religious views and customs, to bear with the haltings and errors of his conscientious brethren. To *please himself*, to gratify his own selfish feelings, by any constraint upon the conscience of a *weak* disciple, was, according to his estimation, to "*destroy him for whom Christ died.*" "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, *but not to doubtful disputations.*" These were not the means to be employed to reclaim him. "Hast thou faith?" says the same inspired instructor—"have it to thyself;" be satisfied with being in the right, as you are confident you are, and not demand a conformity, on the part of others, to your faith. For, in the same connexion, he shows that it would be requiring sin at their hands—"He that doubteth," and still doeth, "is damned." "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." Here too he reproves all illiberality in regard to those subjects where error was not incompatible with piety. "Why judgest thou another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth." Inculcating that Christ is the only Lord of the conscience, and our duty is, not to usurp authority over his service. We are not to judge him who is obedient to his own convictions of duty, as God is *only*

*Judge.* Where disagreement of opinion exists, there must be neither condemnation nor contempt; and the reason is given "*because God has revived him.*" God's judgment in the case should always be sufficiently strict for erring man.

Similar is the spirit of the following Epistles. The Saints are exhorted to "have *fervent charity one toward another.*" That charity which "*suffereth long and is kind*"—which "*beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, and endureth all things.*" Which, to sum up all, "*covereth a multitude of sins.*" Such are the exhortations addressed, by the different inspired penmen, to "the twelve tribes scattered abroad"—to all God's Israel. "To the strangers, (pilgrims) scattered throughout all nations"—requiring of them that they should throw the mantle of *forgiveness*, as well as *endurance*, over all errors, in a brother, not essentially corrupting to the Church, or incompatible with christian character.

## CHAPTER III.

THE DEVIATIONS OF THE MODERN CHURCH;—BAPTISM—AND THE RELATION IT SUSTAINS TO  
CHRISTIAN CHARACTER.

Our next natural subject of enquiry is—Has, or has not, the Church of our day departed from the order and spirit of its primitive head? And, if so, *in what respects?*

It cannot be doubted, from the examination of scripture already presented, that the simplicity and sincerity of Apostolic religion has, to a great degree, departed from the Church. Zion is yet travelling out of the wilderness of the middle age; and the forms of intolerance and error already past still cast over her their dark shadows. The Harlot of Rome yet throws her sin stained mantle, as the Church recedes, over some of her features. But the day star of her glory hastens to her meridian, to throw full in her face the light of Apostolic example and primitive piety; which promises to dissipate all darkness, and reveal her in her *bridal robes*, ‘having neither spot nor wrinkle, nor any such thing;’ and to present her ‘a chaste virgin to Christ.’

Nothing but an earnest search for ‘the old paths,’ with a willingness to walk therein, at any sacrifice, brings the least hope, to the Church, of deliverance from her unceasing and self propogating divisions. And may a merciful Savior, whose honor is so much concerned in the issue, grant, to all who love his ap-

pearing, a preparation of heart suited to such a work.

As the aim of the early christians, in the regulation of the Church, was *the union*, as well as edification of the whole body of Christ; and the future prospect of the Church is *to be united*; light will be thrown upon our present position equally from primitive example and a millennial prospect. And our enquiries must relate, not only to what was the spirit and polity of the Apostolic Church, but to what must be the spirit and polity of that Church which aims to meet the demands of the latter day.

I. The enquiry arises, *whether the saints have scriptural authority for making their difference of sentiment on baptism occasion of difference in the Church.* This part of our subject deserves to be approached with peculiar care and tenderness, because of the extreme sensitiveness of the public mind in relation to it. It seems to have become, not from any cause growing out of its superior importance, when compared with other commands on which christians differ, and a part without doubt err from the truth, the field of the hottest controversy, the very focus of theological debate. The bosom of the Church, constantly bleeding from the lacerations thus received, recoils from the weapon that so constantly lacerates it; and, on either side, the least conflict of opinion aggravates wounds kept *ever fresh* and *perpetually irritated*.

It is not our design to enter upon the endlessly contested controversy respecting the subjects and mode of baptism. The subject of our enquiry is separate and distinct from it. It will be necessary however, lest the position to be assumed should be misunderstood, to give a brief statement of the present position of parties.

The reader perhaps will not need to be informed

that a denomination of christians numerically larger than any other in our land, and extensively spread over the whole christian world, deny wholly the validity of infant baptism, and consider it, together with the sprinkling of adults, a human invention, not countenanced by scripture, nor by the practice of earlier and purer ages. And that the immersion of a believer in water, in the name of the Trinity, alone answers the command, or meets the design of gospel baptism. These christians are called Baptists, in distinction from all others of an opposite opinion, who are termed Pedobaptists. It must be obvious that, to the former denomination, all non-immersed saints are held, and from the nature of the case must be held, as *unbaptised*.

And, connecting their views of baptism, with the generally accredited principle that this ordinance is *the door into*, or an indispensable prerequisite *to* church connexion—uncharitable as the views may appear, and illiberal the practice which accrues to it—still it is consistent, and, from the premises, *unavoidable*. They are compelled, not only to refuse to commune with any but their own sect, but to hold all others as guilty in partaking of the Eucharist *by themselves* even; and, in the strict sense of the term *unchurched*. Can any one fail of discovering the origin of this effectual barrier to the union of the saints to be a principle common to both parties? It may, in a practical bearing, be the most severe upon the Baptists, but it is the same in essence with both denominations. In this view, nothing can appear more unjust than that restricted communion should be made an occasion of unkind reflection upon one branch of the Church, by another, whose sentiments on that point, precisely correspond with those of the denomination reproached. Candor requires that either both parties



should acquiesce in the propriety of restricted communion, as the result of a principle common to them both; or else rest the imposed censure upon the fact that *one of God's children* is refused a place at the table, independent of the question whether he has been baptized or not. If the Baptist is to be asked to hold church relation, or communion, with the Pedobaptist, it must be that he should do it as with an individual (in his opinion) unbaptised. And the correctness of that principle both parties alike must recognise and maintain. It will require no remarkable sagacity to perceive, that if baptism, by divine appointment, is absolutely pre-requisite to the enjoyment of Church privileges, an end is at once put to all occasion of reflection upon the practice of a Church withholding the sacred emblems from all, however worthy in other respects, who, in its opinion, for any cause, are unbaptised. And farther still, all bodies of saints, in the opinion of a Church, unbaptised, must be denied, by them, the name and privileges of a sister Church. In short, to the Baptist, no individual, out of the limits of his own sect, is to be recognized as a church member, and no community of believers, however sacredly covenanted together, as a Church of Christ. And here too is found an end to all hope of union in the body of Christ, unless it be in the total annihilation of the distinguishing principles of one of these contending parties. One sect must entirely subdue to itself the other, in opinion and practice, before any direct attempt can be made to secure christian union. A cheerless prospect! A hope built upon impossibilities!

The contentious and scismatical in the Church may delight in the continuance of this controversy in its present form. It may afford an agreeable outlet through which to vent their turbulent spirit, and give

free course to their unholy feelings. But it is confidently believed that the more consistent christians of every name, at least in their better hours, are tired of the fruitless, or rather destructive protraction of this controversy, as it now proceeds. It has waxed warm and destructive to Zion's peace, and to a world's salvation for ages. Its fruits are before the world, and the prospect too. And are they such as encourage its continuance? Its continuance, we mean, as the hopeful means of coming at the right of the case, and bringing about union of sentiment on the question involved? We are no advocates for smothering up enquiry on any question of duty, provided it may be pursued in a way promising good results. Has not this dispute, carried, on as it is wont to be, with an acrimonious spirit, and with the unholy design of advancing the interests of a sect, generally resulted in the disgrace of churches, the heaping of reproach upon the kingdom of Christ, the breaking up of revivals and sowing the seeds of rancorous feeling and protracted discord among the brotherhood, rather than in any thing good? And are we advancing to the settlement of the question? Whose hopes are sanguine? Whose courage unfaltering that the termination of the contest draws nigh? Alas, we are not even approximating to such an issue, in the present economy of the Church. This war is one of dreadful expense with no realizations, or the prospect of any; while each party, with a decision such as death cannot shake, clings to the maintaining of its position.

Shall we not learn wisdom by what we see? God stands ready, by its own spirit's teachings, to settle this question for us, and, in lapse of time, would settle it, if we were willing to lay it over into his hands. But we are too impatient and faithless to commit it to the decisions of a conscience gradually divested of

selfish and sinister motives, party prejudice and sectarian ambition, and, in our haste and solicitude for a favorable verdict, interpose carnal efforts to urge it on to a decision. The consequence is, we wrest the work out of the only hands that can effectually carry it forward. And thus we prevent the issue that all are laboring to promote. The truth on this subject, as on all other, can never maintain its right in the contest against blinded judgment and heated passion.— Success depends upon removing prejudices, the uniting of interests, the promotion of genuine piety, and upon that free, kind and impartial interchange of thought, under the teachings of the Spirit, which will disarm all opposing feelings, and remove the veil from every blinded eye.

That *pure love of the truth*, which frequently has been urged as one's apology in factious conduct, when he has given way to unholy feelings and efforts in the arena of denominational strife, if rationally exercised would prompt us to aim our strongest efforts at preparing the minds of our opponents to look impartially at the truth; and when the object is, in any good degree, secured, to trust with confidence the issue in the hands of God. If either party could hope that the other would be silent, while the privilege of agitation should be left entirely to itself, there might be some encouragement in perpetuating its present efforts. But, as it is, argument begets argument, and attack provokes attack, from the belligerent parties, in such equal ratio, lack of truth always being made up by an increase of zeal, and the balance of reason, on either hand, however weighty, counteracted, on the other, by a corresponding increase of prejudice, that controversy, evidently, instead of promising to lead to an adjustment of the difficulty, gives the strongest assurances of perpetuating it.

All saints must see enough of present discrepancy of opinion and causes for its continuance, as matters now stand, to know that it is vain for either party to hope to secure union by reducing the other to itself.

If union is ever to be secured, it will be on different principles from those which are maintained, alike by each of the contending parties. Each seems alike to content itself with contending, at arms length, over the formidable wall that divides them, and vainly attempting to bring over its opponent, without examining the strength of the barrier between. The Pedobaptist demands of his brother Immersionist to receive him to his communion, and recognise him as a church member, on principles alike contradictory to both their opinions; and, if he refuses, condemns him without mercy, for not violating a principle which even he himself dares not set aside. While the Baptist, on the other hand, without waiting to examine the grounds on which rests a principle so important in its bearings upon his religious practices, takes the argumentum ad hominem, (reasoning from universal consent) and says—‘If baptism, as my opponents and friends both admit, is the appointed door into the Church, prerequisite, according to divine appointment, to church immunities, and immersion, and that only, constitutes baptism, then none are church members but immersed believers, and therefore, none others qualified for church privileges.’

We ask both parties, in justice to each other, and to the bleeding cause they profess to love, to step forward, and settle by mutual inquiry, this harassing question. To do this would be summarily disposing of much *ever burning* yet unconsumed fuel for contention; and opening a door for peace in the Church, most auspicious to *this world*, and rejoicing to *that above*.

If baptism is made, in Scripture, from its connexion with church relation, indispensable in any circumstances to church privileges, and the saints can be satisfied of it, no stones can be cast at brethren for acting in conformity with that principle. The true convert, that happens to embrace the opinion that baptism and immersion are synonymous terms, (and that there will continue to be such, none, it is apprehended, will question\*) will never be subject to the charge of illiberality in restricting his communion to immersed believers entirely; and the fact that all churches of that persuasion deny to all others the character of churches of Christ, and talk of their members, and deal with them, as they do with those acknowledgedly without church relation, will be no matter of reflection or offence. For the Baptist to take this broad ground of disfellowshipping those who do not accord with him in opinion, (that which, from modesty, if their true position has rewarded it, few of them have ventured to assume,) will not subject him to the charge of being uncharitable, or of exalting his own wisdom or holiness above that of his fellow disciples; but simply leave him condemned, (if that is a crime) for holding exclusively to immersion for baptism. While all the devoted and conscientious Pedobaptist will be found guilty in, before the eye of his immersed brother, will be in having, by misapprehension, neglected to do a duty which he solemnly believes he ought not to do. Thus situated towards each other can any censure be imposed by christian upon christian? Each has done all which his con-

\*It will be understood, in making this assertion, the author has reference only to the period this side of the millennial day. He enters upon no conjecture about what will be the final ground of union of sentiment.

victions of duty to God requires, and all which, in the present state of his mind, his most scrupulous brother can ask of him. Certainly a most desirable issue of the controversy, if truth will sustain it, and if none more auspicious can be expected.

But we are inclined to believe that this will not be the issue of this controversy. For the result would be inevitably a confirmed and perpetual division from which the Church could not hope to be extricated.

It seems more reasonable to suppose that the Church will be found in error on what it considers to be the relation which baptism sustains to Church connexion or privileges. Not that we would presume this rite will be dispensed with, or held as unimportant in the Church; but that importance will be attributed to it for other and more consistent reasons, and the institution sustained on more rational principles than those which now, in part, support it. The principle which now generally obtains, and which, it is presumed, will eventually be discarded, is this: That baptism sustains such a relation to church connexion and privileges, that whatever may be the manifest piety of an individual, and his strict observance of *all known duty*, if his views of what constitutes that ordinance prevents his complying with it, in the way of divine appointment, or he is forbidden compliance by bodily infirmity, that *this omission* necessarily disqualifies him for them. Let us here be distinctly understood. We do not mean by baptism, when we say *it is not a prerequisite to communion*, the state of heart which submission to that ordinance presupposes, but the external rite itself. If some other collateral cause steps in this side of the state of mind which qualifies one for baptism, and pleases God in compliance with it, and that cause prevents submission to the visible ceremony, it does not render the individu-

al incompetent or disqualified for church privileges.

To establish this position we shall now have recourse to the principles sustained in the preceding chapter. It would be natural to look for some argument to sustain the supposed connection between the two ordinances of the Lord's house in the nature of the case. Rational beings as we are constituted, and having for the subject of our enquiry the influence of moral causes upon christian character, it is natural to suppose that baptism, as above defined, if it sustains the relation attributed to it, could be shown to exert some direct influence upon the candidate to qualify him for a church member, of which any other could be shown to be deficient. But, to our knowledge, no such attempt has ever been made. If we ask for any such influence to be exhibited, flowing from the baptism of water, establishing the supposed connexion, we are always turned off with the cold assertion that *it exists*, without being afforded the least gleam of light into either the nature or extent of the supposed influence. We conclude it must be beyond the investigations of moral science, so as to elude observation; or else, what is more probable, entirely the creature of imagination. The assertion is made, however, with unabated confidence, notwithstanding all this, that this connexion exists, and it is thrown upon Scripture for its final support. Let us now meet the enquiry there.

We have shown, in a former chapter, that *the Church*, in the Scripture sense, denotes an assembly or organization of christians associated for the worship and service of God, independent of the forms by which these obligations are set forth. That it is purely a distinction of religious character, and not of party peculiarity.

But the objector enquires—was not baptism the ap-

pointed door into this sacred relation? We answer, it is in no instance stated to be such. The scriptures have nowhere defined this to be its exclusive office. As a matter of fact, it is not true that all church members became such by submitting to this ordinance. Paul says to the Ephesians "Now ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone."\* It will be seen here that the Church existed before the commission to baptise on a profession of evangelical faith, and in the name of the Trinity, had been given, and therefore baptism, to all previous members, was not indispensable to this connection.—A word will here be demanded on the validity of John's Baptism. Whether it was christian baptism or not—under the Law or under the Gospel—we have neither time nor need of enquiring. That it was far more deficient, in every essential particular, in answering the design of the ordinance, as explained by the Apostles, than the baptism of many, and even all christians, in this day, whom a part of the Church hold as unbaptised, is fully apparent. The mere outward rite might have answered better what they consider scripture to require, but the state of the mind and the heart, that which gives reality and effect to all ceremonial observances, was in John's infinitely more defective. It is very evident to every careful reader of the New Testament, that the Forerunner neither baptised in the name of the Trinity, nor on the manifestation of evidence of piety. For Christ was not known, as John declares—"I knew him not" till his office had nearly expired. And the Holy

\*Eph. 2: 20.



Ghost, in his distinct capacity, had not yet been sent. Besides, the people, and even Christ's disciples, had no adequate conception of the atonement, and the special agency of the Spirit in conversion, truths inseparable from a valid observance of the ordinance, till after the resurrection. The belief which John required was also, from the necessities of the case, a mere *prospective faith*—a promise to believe on him who should come after. The evidence on which the faith was to be built was yet to be revealed, much more the belief itself. The repentance demanded was also of the most partial character. If we look into the third chapter of Luke, we shall find this most plainly demonstrated. John had exhorted the candidates to "bring forth fruits meet for repentance" before they present themselves for baptism. And the enquiry now arises, from several classes who were desirous of submitting to the ordinance, what shall we do to manifest those fruits? And what are his replies? One was to be liberal to the destitute—"He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none." Another was to become honest in his deal—"Exact no more than what is appointed you." And a third was to do violence to no man, and be content with his wages." Surely very different instruction from what would be expected of one who made evangelical repentance and faith prerequisite to baptism; and very different fruits from what are necessary to give evidence of a new birth. Another fact should be here observed—John was very popular with the people. What could not have been true had he lifted the standard of doctrine and requirement to the full height of the New Testament dispensation. If the Apostles were in such odium with the people, and on every side attacked by persecution, even after Christ's time, in what repute would John have been had he

preached and enforced, in all their rigour, the same doctrines at an earlier period. Christ was the Sun of righteousness, and he only the Morning Star that ushered him in.

And John made many proselytes. "All Jerusalem, and Judea, and the region round about Jordan" went out to his baptism. And his conditions were so easy, and so universally met by the population, that it is said "*all the people* were baptised." But where were all these genuine converts when Christ walked among them in every city jeopardizing his life? A few Galileans only were willing to call him master, and he "had not where to lay his head." Where were they at his crucifixion? Where, when with every practicable effort, only five hundred brethren from all Palestine could be gathered together to witness his resurrection?

If we admit that all the twelve disciples were baptised of John, when, with the maintenance of a total silence in respect to all the rest, the Bible is satisfied with a mere intimation of the baptism of two. Who does not clearly see that their baptism was not, in any essential particular, answering the demand of baptism on a profession of evangelical faith? And that the conclusion is unavoidable that the first communicants, those who were present at the institution of the Lord's supper, were, in the gospel sense, unbaptised?

But suppose we yield this whole point. The church is built upon the foundation of "Prophets" as well as Apostles. Were they baptised? Was the Church that preceded the Forerunner, and even he himself, baptised? How was it with Isaiah and Elijah and Abraham and Enoch and Abel? Does not church membership consist with no baptism? If some of our readers insist upon circumcision as answering to baptism and thus endeavour to sustain the indispensa-

bleness of the initiatory ordinance—let them remember that God's church began with Abel and existed in Enoch and Noah and Lot e'er this seal of the covenant was given to Abraham and his seed.

But the term Church is applied prospectively, as well as retrospectively, in designation of the people of God. (Eph. 5: 22—26, 27. and Col. 1: 18.) It comprehended all for whom our Saviour prayed that *they might be one*, even all who should believe on him through his Ambassador's word. In short, it drew the line of holy discrimination around all the countless multitude of the redeemed, who, as "the Bride," shall go up, in spotless robes, to have part in the coronation of the Lamb, and be seated with him on his throne.

How many living stones were built upon this foundation ere a Saviour appeared in the flesh, or the ordinance of baptism and the supper were instituted? And how many, since that period, have been begotten by the Spirit, and thus united to Christ's body, to whom no water has been applied, significant of the internal washing, and will be found members, at last, of the Church triumphant? And yet they were never baptised with water. Are the regulations of the Church below made, by divine appointment, more strict than those of the Church above? Paul's criterion in an earlier and purer age, was—"God has received him," Shall we presume to be more strict?—If so, let us do it with the understanding that we thus exalt our own judgment above that of the Almighty, and the rigor of human requirements above the standard of heaven.

Baptism is not then the appointed and exclusive door of the Church of Christ. It was instituted, and commanded to be perpetuated, for other and more rational purposes, than to be used thus to divide in sunder the body of Christ. There have been efforts

made to distinguish between the real Church and "the visible Church." We do not call in question the existence of this distinction. It is in our day a marked one; and exhibits, in most glaring colors, the corruption of existing religious organizations, and the prevalence of spiritual despotism. The existence of such a distinction in apostolic times, may perhaps, by the nicest discrimination, be made apparent. But it was materially a different distinction from that which now is advocated. The universal church then numbered none who were necessarily excluded from the visible church. It was the divine purpose and the economy of his servants to identify together their respective boundaries. The only distinction then apparent was what arose out of the necessities of the case—the one implying the *christian by birth*, and the other the *christian by profession*. As the first thing done, after conversion, was to put on Christ outwardly, and no barriers prevented the performance of this duty, the distinction, with individuals, was but for a moment. And if, to belong to the one, was not identically to be a member of the other, it was to be a worthy and acceptable candidate for it. These principles and precedent commend themselves to the regard and scrupulous observance of the modern church.

But how is it with that distinction which makes submission to some outward ordinance, or allegiance to some ecclesiastical dynasty, or the espousal of some system of doctrine, all *independent of true piety*, and not connected with giving evidence of conscientious obedience to Christ, a condition of connection with the visible church? The Bible evidently has not made nor warranted it. If men have originated or are sustaining any other church than *God's real one*, made *visible* by the confession of Christ before the world, and by joining hands and hearts with

all the sacred brotherhood, that are willing to associate together, for the promotion of personal piety and the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom, they have done this contrary to the divine will, by removing inwardly the landmarks\* from where God has pleased them, building walls of separation, and instituting terms of distinction, which he has not authorized—but in the plainest terms condemned. Against *such visibility* heaven protests. Has Christ ever built a fold for a part of his sheep, whose restrictions and laws necessarily exclude another part? Has he made provision of pasture for only *a part* of those for whom he died? Has he placed under shepherds over only *a part* of the flock under their immediate inspection, to discipline and nourish it, which Jesus is to gather, ere long, *collectively* into his own kingdom, where there is "one fold and one shepherd."†

But still it is contended that baptism is a *positive institution*, definitely and unequivocally enjoined upon all true converts in connection with repentance, and *as necessary* to church relation and privileges.—And there are those who urge that the same proofs are afforded in scripture to substantiate the prerequisite of the one as the other. That it is a positive duty, and sacredly binding upon every follower of Christ, and that the church should insist on its strict observance, and use the most rational and successful

\* If God held as criminal him who removed his neighbors landmarks, what shall his guilt be who removes Jehovah's?

† Under-Shepherds sometimes move round among the flock designating individuals for their *visible churches* in language like this: "Here is one rightly constituted for a Methodist," "This will do for a Baptist"—"That will make a good Congregationalist" and "This is good enough for an Episcopalian." How little like the Great Shepherd who sought out, for his *visible Glory*, *all sinners that repented*,

means to secure it, we are far from denying. That this ordinance should be held sacred in the church, and given as prominent a place as it occupied in the preaching and practice of early ages, we would be behind no *lover of all the truth* in maintaining. If we do not grossly mistake both our feelings and motives, we assume our present position, not merely with an unabated attachment to the correct observance of what God has enjoined in the command "be baptised," but with a confident expectation that we are entering upon the only scriptural and effectual course to promote the obedience desired. We would have it preached and administered to every true convert. We do not plead for any abatement in the respect paid to it, and the obedience required by the Church, even to the utmost of what is practicable. We do not believe, it is true, in requiring of one of Christ's acknowledged disciples, before extending to him the fraternal hand, and welcoming him *to*, and recognising him *in* the church he has instituted, that he should do what he has no conviction that it is his duty to do; and what, after full and repeated examination, made in prayer, and with a submissive will, he solemnly believes it would be wicked for him to do. We are satisfied with having done all our abilities will permit, in the pure love of the truth, to enlighten and impress his mind with a sense of what we view to be the divine requirement, and then are willing to leave the individual whose obedience we desire to perfect, and whose piety we delight to promote, to do according as his convictions of duty direct. We would lay the command, "be baptised" upon his conscience by the side of all other divine requirements, endeavouring to have all press upon it with *equal weight*. And while we would not for our right hand treat any of them as *non essential*, urging ever the

Saviour's searching test—"If ye love me ye will keep my commandments"—we would not, on the other hand, attempt to lead him, much less to force him, to go counter to, or beyond his own well informed and fully settled convictions of duty. For us to demand it, in respect to any command, is vain and absurd in the extreme. And for the christian, if possible, to do it, would be both culpable in his own view, and that of his Maker. With these remarks we leave it to the candor of the reader to decide whether or not we are guilty of treating lightly the ordinance of baptism, or encouraging indifference with regard to it in the church. If we are, then all ministers and members who forbear with any act of disobedience, it matters not what it is, or whether it be deliberately or inadvertently committed, contrary to or in accordance with what was believed to be right, that minister and members are guilty of treating lightly that sin and encouraging indifference with regard to it.

We are willing to assert, what every christian must acknowledge, that to forbear with errors in the church, such as impugn not one's piety and correct intention, is not to sanction them. That individuals must stand or fall to their own master in all delinquency or crime not bringing into question his adoption or devotion to God, and not essentially corrupting to the church.—The assertion is hazarded that not a church of our land gathers around the sacramental board, at its appointed feast, that collects not among its number those who are guilty both *inadvertently* and *deliberately*, of breaking some divine command. And high as are our hopes for the purity of the church, and strenuous as should be our efforts to rid it of such impurity, who is prepared to say he will partake with no transgressor? May God speed the hour when his church shall be able to bring up its members to such purity

as to have not one within its pale, who so dishonors his profession as to indulge in *known sin* ; then it will be early enough to take seriously in hand such as are guilty only of indulging the *unknown*.

Our duty with regard to baptism is the same as with regards to other commands *not to be our brothers keepers*, but honestly, with a pure desire before God, to do our utmost, to lead him to understand and do his duty. If we fail in our efforts, what we are liable to do, as in our labours to promote obedience to other command, leave him with the responsibility of his error, (as we esteem it) upon his own soul. But we should love him still, we should fellowship him yet, as we expect him to love and fellowship us in the liberty to do what we esteem duty, although wrong in his estimation. Appeal the question to the Judgment, where all our differences will be impartially canvassed. And suppose it turns out there that he is *unbaptised*. He has submitted to what he believed was baptism, publicly professed all that the ceremony denotes, and covenanted solemnly with the people of God to obey his requirements.

And the question comes home to us, has his mistake on baptism annulled his churchmembership, and made it criminal for him to partake or for others to participate with him, in church privileges? Here are two ordinances,—both equally obligatory. Does a mistake in regard to the one, a misconception of its requirement, annul the obligation, not to say *make it criminal*, to submit to the other? We say he is a church member, and entitled to the privileges of a church member, independent of that supposed error. And if, in the sight of God, he has erred on baptism, he will be found guilty, not in having commemorated the love of Christ, held fellowship with the church and fulfilled its remaining obligations, but in the oth-



er particular alone. "*These things* ought thou to have done," will be judgment of the King, "and not to have left *the other* undone."

It should be borne in mind, by the reader, that if it is wrong for an Immersionist to hold church relation and communion with a non-immersed christian, his crime is only *that of a participant*, the primary guilt is on the part of him who dares partake without immersion. It is wrong, for such an one, to partake any where of the sacred emblems, if so among Baptists. And if he is virtually *out of* the Baptist church, because "*without the door*," he is, for the same reason, *in no church*, no other body of saints is a church.

It remains for us now to examine a few of the prominent considerations which have sustained, in the minds of some christians, an opposite opinion. And it is duty here to remark that the burden of proof devolves upon them and not upon ourselves. It is vain for an advocate of *restricted communion*—and all are to be considered such who oppose the views here maintained—when we ask him for the authority by which he justifies his practice and defends his opinions, to reply by asking our authority for permitting any to participate but the baptised. To say nothing of the argument which would accrue from the fact already demonstrated that every *true Israelite*, every new born soul is fitted, by the *one baptism of the Spirit*, for the privileges of Christ's house, and entitled to them by his heirship, unless he has by sin voluntarily and knowingly committed forfeited that privilege and rendered himself worthy of exclusion; nor of what is equally plain that the command, "Do this as oft as ye do it, in remembrance of me," was given to the disciples as *Christ's followers*, and enjoined upon them purely with reference to their being such,

baptism not entering into the account, only as obedience to it formed an ingredient of christian character—who can be so blind as not to observe that, from the nature of the institution of the Lord's supper, and the same is true of all other church privileges, it belongs to all the regenerated. Such, and *all such*, without reference to any other considerations, are subject to the emotions which it is calculated to inspire, and have experienced the reality of all which, in the type, is shadowed forth. The evidence then is *prima facie*, that all the saints should participate in it.

One other remark will be in place here. The evidence must be direct and definite, such as cannot be mistaken, to invalidate the conclusion which we have now formed. No plausible presumptions or forced inferences will be of sufficient weight to do away impressions of duty so plain, so natural to the case, and so accordant with scripture.

I. It is frequently urged, to show that Baptism is an indispensable qualification for communion, that it was *first instituted* and that this indicates it should be *first observed*. We shall enter here upon no discussion in respect to John's Baptism. It will be seen that the force of the argument presented depends entirely upon the estimate which is placed upon this ordinance as practiced by the Forerunner. The reader is referred to what has been already briefly said on this topic. If it is true, as seems quite certain, that John's baptism, in every prominent particular, was not the same as that of the Apostles, then the argument presented is not merely invalidated, but turned fully to our advantage. For the Lord's supper strictly was the first instituted, christian baptism resting for its authority upon the commission given to the disciples at their Lord's ascension. But we are not driven to the use of such an argument to sustain our position. And

indeed whatever use is made of the point at issue, it affects so triflingly the final conclusion, that we feel, in regard to it, a comparative indifference. If all that is attempted to be deduced from it were fully made out, it would be simply this: that, in order of time, baptism appropriately comes before communion. A conclusion which we are as ready to admit as our opponents. Many duties appropriately are demanded of us as precedent to others, and still reasons may exist for doing the latter while the former have been neglected. If the saint has mistaken *one day* in regard to a duty he owes to God, is that neglect to excuse, much less to make criminal, the performance of the duties of *the next*? Repentance for all sin and a full consecration of all one has to God, is a duty we all acknowledge to be precedent to partaking of the Lord's supper. Its precedence has not merely plain scripture to support it, but it is evident from the nature of the case. The mind is thus qualified to partake worthily and profitably. Private fasting and prayer are preparatory duties to public worship; and it is evident they are made, according to the divine will, precedent in order of time. But are we authorised to refuse the sacred emblems to all who present themselves for communion and do not give us full evidence that they are thus penitent and consecrated? and to close the doors of our sanctuaries upon all worshippers who have not come from their closets, having prepared themselves there, by communion with God, for the holy devotions of the public temple? The answer is ready from the lips of the great Lawgiver: "These things oughtest thou to have done, and not to have left the other undone." The soul that enters the sanctuary to worship *ought* to have been prepared by prayer, the communicant *ought* to have had every sin cancelled by the blood of Jesus, the

candidate for the church *ought* to have been baptised; but, if they are Christ's children, they are neither *forbidden* nor excused from doing whatever else their Lord has commanded, and to their *own master* they must give an account for past transgressions.

II. It is urged that Christ, in the commission given to his disciples, authorises the practice we discard. "Go ye therefore and teach all nations *baptising* them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe *all things whatsoever I have commanded you.*" There is no controversy among saints about the order in which ministers should teach and enforce all that this command requires. We all agree in its being our first duty to teach, or disciple men, and then to baptise them, teaching them to observe all divine requirements. But there are some who urge that this scripture authorises the minister of the gospel to withhold instruction in other duties, and the offer of other privileges, from all who have not, in their opinion, yielded obedience to the order of duty prescribed by these words. Says the advocate of restricted communion: "Here is the law of Baptism and of Communion.—First, an individual must be converted, then baptised, and afterwards be admitted to the communion, as *one of the things* Christ had commanded." Admit it. And how must we deal with *the many other things* which Christ commanded? If the christian minister is directed here to refuse the participation of the Lord's supper to one who has mistaken his duty on baptism, and in his opinion has not submitted to that rite, because Christ says, after baptism is enjoined he should teach to observe *all the things he had commanded*, he is equally directed to refuse teaching such delinquents in respect to baptism *all the other things*

Christ taught. The language is not “disciple—baptise, and teach to observe *the sacrament*”—but “teach them to observe *all things* whatsoever I have commanded you.” Here is a bundle of duties bound up in the same sentence all *equally* to be denied him, if any of them are. If the language of this commission enjoins or authorizes the refusal of the Lord’s Supper to such as we deem *unbaptised*, it requires also, in the same declaration, the withholding from them every species of instruction peculiar to saints. The same authority which shuts them from the communion table, bars against them the doors of our conference rooms, circles of religious instruction and sanctuaries.

The only reasonable conclusion we can draw from this command is that it enjoins the duties prescribed, and arranges the order of words according to correct principles of language, and as was natural, placing first in order that which he designed should first arise to the mind of the christian, and which, from its nature, would demand the earliest attention. We do not plead to have the order varied. We would urge upon all to follow *to the letter* the command here given. But the conclusion that restricted communionists draw from it, is most unwarranted and absurd. If it makes it the duty of ministers to lead sinners to conversion before baptism, and to baptise *willing converts* before leading them farther on in religious observances—still it may fall far short of authorizing them to deny *all instruction* farther, in what Christ taught, to such as are judged to be unbaptised. And it certainly does this if it authorizes shutting them away from communion.

III. But it is insisted upon, by our opponents, that the practice of the Apostles was a practical demon-

stration of the principle they think to be inculcated in the commission. They say that these inspired men understood what was required of them and practised in conformity, when they administered baptism regularly before admitting the convert to church privileges. We shall not deny that all then were baptised before coming to the other ordinances of God's house. And we would, as anxiously as any, urge upon saints now that they should do likewise. We say more—if an individual, who is clearly convinced of the nature and import of baptism, as must have been all christians then, should neglect to attend to it before he entered into church covenant he would be guilty of a criminal irregularity. All we contend for is—if an individual, after all that can be done to enlighten him in the truth, remains under darkness or mistake about this ordinance that prevents his submitting to what, in the mind of the church, constitutes it, that delinquency, other things being right, does not forfeit the privilege or cancel the duty of other ordinances in the church. That there is no dependance of church membership or communion upon baptism which warrants such a conclusion.

Not that we would attempt to set aside the force of primitive example; it is one of the best sources of religious instruction. Nor would we, on the other hand, admit that *a practice being Apostolic*, necessarily demands to be perpetuated. Says Robert Hall—"to attempt to determine under what circumstances the highest precedent possesses the form of law involves a difficult and delicate enquiry. There is one general rule however applicable to the subject, which is, that no matter of fact is entitled to be considered an authoritative precedent, which *necessarily* arose out of existing circumstances, that in the *then existing state of things* it could not have failed to

have occurred." The reason is obvious. All law is dependent upon the Divine will; and where a case comes under the above rule, it has no dependance upon God's will; it may arise out of circumstances independent of it. In every case of an Apostolic precedent we ascertain whether it was expressive of the Divine will, *as a rule of conduct*, or whether it was purely the result of circumstances. For instance several incidents were connected with the institution of the Lord's supper, and it is important that we ascertain what conformity to them is required in commemorating it. We are commanded to '*do this*, as oft as we do it, in remembrance of him.' *Do what?* The supper then was celebrated *in an upper room, reclining at a table, at midnight*, and with *unleavened bread*;—why are these incidents not perpetuated? Because, evidently, they were the result of circumstances, and not expressive of Christ's will. But the *bread was broke*, accompanied with a blessing; and *the wine poured*, with giving of thanks; and *all partook*; these incidents are *considered binding*. And why? Because they seem to be expressive of the will of the Saviour, and are not dependent upon the circumstances of the times.

We have likewise several incidents connected with conversion and assuming church relation in Apostolic times. The Apostles preached *repentance* and *faith*, and *baptised* those giving evidence of conversion, and broke bread to them. These incidents are evidently binding upon the Church as a rule of conduct. But there were other incidents that are not thus expressive of the Divine will. The converts were evidently baptised without individual examination, and, in connecting themselves with the church, gave up all personal possessions, and made common stock of their property. Why are not these incidents

binding upon us, as examples? Evidently because they are considered as arising out of *the circumstances of the times*, and not the *direct will* of the Lawgiver.

To which of these classes does the incident that none were received into church connexion and privileges unbaptised belong? On the solution of this question hangs the whole controversy. That it belongs to the latter, is manifest from the fact that immediately, *the same hour*, that men repented they were baptised. And as there then could be no mistake upon any one's mind about the law of baptism, it was a consequence that no one genuinely converted could ask for communion, or union with their number, unbaptised. Who does not now see that the fact, that no unbaptised one partook, or was enrolled with the brethren, is dependent not upon *the mind of the Spirit*, that the lack of the water ceremony in any circumstances rendered an individual unqualified, but upon the time of baptism being required, and the state of opinion respecting what constituted it?

We are ready also to admit that if one unbaptised had offered himself for church privileges, he would have been rejected. Why? Not because of *that ceremony's* necessary connexion with communion that forbade his reception, but the state of heart his refusal to be baptised would have denoted. It would have shown him *wilfully disobedient* to God's will. And this should exclude any one.

But the question here may be asked why baptism was always enjoined in connexion with repentance and so early administered? To answer this question, belongs rather to those of an opposite opinion than to ourselves. *Their* opinion, not *ours*, hangs upon its answer; and that too, we conceive, in an unwarrantable way. The ordinance of baptism was enjoined in connexion with repentance, and not church mem-



bership. The same sentence usually covered the two duties. Both when they are enjoined by way of command, and spoken of as performed. Whereas connection with the church, and its connected duties, are spoken of in separate paragraphs, and *as a subsequent and independent* transaction. Sinners were not exhorted *to repent*, in a separate and distinct requirement from baptism, and after good evidence was afforded of conversion, in a subsequent lesson of religious duty, directed to be *baptised into the church*, and fulfill its responsibilities. And when any thing is spoken of the state of mind manifested by one submitting to baptism, it is *not prospective*—relating to his *yielding to church duties* and *assuming church vows*, but *retrospective*—relating to conversion. “They that *gladly received the word* were baptised” on the day of Pentecost. And Philip in preparing the mind of the Eunuch for this ordinance, only had reference to his faith—“*if thou believest* with all thine heart thou mayest.” It would have been natural, and to be expected, if some necessary connexion between baptism and church membership and immunities had placed baptism in precedence, for allusion to have been made to it, and the mind of a candidate called *prospectively* to a view of that relation. Besides when church connexion was spoken of, for the same reason, we should have looked for some allusion to baptism. But, instead of this, the mind of the Spirit seemed to rest purely on *piety* as qualifying for church membership. “There were added unto them daily, such as should be saved.” They were baptised, we doubt not, but their baptism depended, for its precedence, not upon any connexion it held directly with church membership, but with conversion and giving evidence of piety. It seemed to step in, not for its primary object, this was its emblematical application—but as a secondary and

valuable one, to lead the repenting sinner fully to Christ, and then to become a sure test of his conversion. When the Apostles preached "repent," and held up, as they ever did, truths calculated to produce penitence, that truth led not the sinner fully to Christ. He needed to submit himself to God; to sell all that he had, for the pearl of great price. And as the command was finished, in the language, "and be baptised?"—it presented the final and certain test. '*Be baptised?*'—responds the repenting sinner—'Yes, by a public espousal of Jesus Christ, in an ordinance so significant of my profession, of my solemn vows, to give up every thing, my property to confiscation, my name to universal ignominy, my friends to desert and disown me, and my life to flight, persecution and death. Will I do it? Will I have salvation at such a sacrifice?' Here turns the scale of his destiny.—He yields, and, in a moment, his heart is renewed. And this same act, from the state of heart it signified, was the best test of genuine conversion.

Whatever may be thought of the above suggestion about the reason, aside from its emblematical import, if any other is needed, why baptism was preached in immediate connexion with repentance, and immediately administered, it cannot bear a poor comparison with any attempt to exhibit a natural connexion between it and the sacrament that makes the latter absolutely dependent upon it. And it may not be out of place here to add, it affords a very rational solution to the inquiry why the Church in after ages fell into the error of incorporating baptism with regeneration, and thus holding it to be a *saving ordinance*.

IV. It is frequently asserted that the universal consent of the church, in all ages, makes sure the principle that baptism is absolutely prerequisite to church

privileges. This is an attempt to overawe, by weight of authority, without an examination of the merits of the question. A kind of argument which has too much prevailed in the world, and which has operated, with peculiar felicity, in subduing enquiry into the subject at issue. A mode of reasoning, which, if admitted in religious investigation, would lead us into strange absurdities, and cut off investigation all important to the church. Many false opinions have had their origin early in the church, and been universally approved in it, for ages, which have at last been detected, and the cause which led to them clearly discovered. We admit the fact that we are now setting aside a generally approved sentiment of the church, even back to an early stage of its history. And we do this without reluctance, because we cannot see how such a sentiment could have escaped being embraced in connexion with others that early and extensively prevailed.

We have alluded already to the tendency which the intimate connexion of repentance, faith and baptism in Apostolic times, would evidently exert upon the church in a degenerated age. As vital godliness declined, and the power of the divine unction departed from the forms which at first accompanied it, the Almighty's agency, in conversion, was, in a degree forgotten; at least that agency in the office of the Divine Spirit, and attention turned upon accompanying forms. Thus baptism, from being a secondary agent brought in to guide the mind of the sinner to the position where it became consistent for God to convert him, became, in the opinion of the church, an indispensable agent in the work of regeneration, and finally was esteemed regeneration itself.

Eusebius informs us that the Emperor Constantine "finding his end fast approaching, judged it a fit sea-

son for purifying himself from all his offences, and cleansing his soul from that guilt which, in common with other mortals, he had contracted, which he believed was to be effected by the power of mysterious words, and *the saving laver*." Says Justin Martyr, "Whoever believes the things which are affirmed by us to be true, and promise to live accordingly, are afterwards conducted to a place where there is water, *and regenerated*, after the same method which we have experienced." Good men, we thus see, as early as the second century, confounded baptism with regeneration. The more the church has descended from spirituality into dead formality in religion, the more has this same tendency ever been apparent. It is unnecessary for us to trace out the extravagances of practice that grew out of this view—he errors which it engendered, and the haste for this ordinance, carrying it even to *the nursery* and the hands of the midwives in their distinctive offices. It will suffice to say, we need go no farther back to find the origin of the error we now discard. It would have been strange if *regeneration* had not been held as *necessary* to communion, and as long and as far as baptism was identified with it, just so long and extensively would *its* prerequisite be supported. Ask the Roman Catholics, the Lutherans, and members of the Church of England, (more than nineteen twentieths of the professedly christian world,) on what ground they rest the *absolute necessity* of the baptismal rite to participation of the Eucharist, and they will tell you, "by that ordinance we become the children of God and heirs of his kingdom." If such *are the reasons* why it is absolutely prerequisite, let it be shown, and we will not dissent; but no other plea can establish the principle. All that is indispensable to salvation, must be so to church membership.

V. It is generally urged, that as baptism was not among the subjects on which the early christians differed, and yet were directed by an inspired Apostle to forbear with each other in their differences, it therefore cannot come under the rule we have presented. To be sure baptism is not mentioned as one of the subjects on which the saints were to forbear with each other when differences arose; and the reason is obvious,—because no differences respecting it, in Apostolic times, existed. And the inspired teachers always dwelt, in the imparting of the principles of instruction, upon *particular* errors which had arisen; and built upon those errors the *general* laws which were to be universally applied. To deny this, would be to deny the application of any of his instructions to cases not known at the time they were imparted; and, in this way, to render null and void *the whole Bible* to a great part of the human family, whose customs and circumstances have so changed as to render its precepts unadapted to them. If the Bible *does* impart instruction on general principles, if it lays down rules of a universal nature when specific truths are stated, and particular cases are given as *instances* only of their application—what we apprehend few will question—then what are we to learn from such injunctions as these? “Him that is weak in the faith,” or stumbled on doctrines, “*receive ye*, but not to doubtful disputations”—*i. e.* such as are *doubtful as regards their effects*—such as promise no good. “Ye that are *strong*, *i. e.* established in correct sentiment, ought to bear the infirmities of *the weak*, and *not to please yourselves*.” “Why judgest thou another man’s servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth.” “He that *doubteth* and eateth is damned if he eat.” “Destroy not with thy meat him for whom Christ died,” “Whatsoever is not of faith is sin.”

To go beyond one's *convictions* of truth and duty is to violate one's sense of obligation and therefore to displease God.

But we have a case in apostolic times directly in point. It was the dispute to which we have alluded about the indispensableness or indifference of circumcision to church connexion. It will be seen that it occupied the same relative place as the question now at issue. And it is left to the reader's candor to decide, whether the Jewish christians had not more reason to hold as indispensable that rite, with their views of its binding force, and what God has plainly declared, that *no uncircumcised one*, under the Jewish economy, should be allowed to partake of the Passover, than have the most strenuous for the pertinacity with which they cling to enforcing submission to their views of Baptism. Is the plea instituted that if they had been right in their views of its remaining force they would have been justified? We answer—the Gentile christians were right in their opinions of the case, and yet they were required to yield to their Jewish brethren the privilege of doing, not only what they believed to be wrong, but what an inspired council had decided to be contrary to christian economy. The union of the saints was an object *more sacred* with them than the mere assertion of an *abstract right*.

We now say, that we may be fully understood by the reader, we are far from being disposed to lower down the importance of the baptismal rite in the public mind. It has sunk too low, in popular esteem, already. It is evidently so abused, by being made the *rallying point of party*, and urged upon the young disciple on wrong principles, that it is becoming sadly a matter of indifference. Our anxiety is that its importance may be asserted from what are its *real* and *rational*, rather than its *fancied* claims. Nor do we

say that it is unimportant at what stage of christian experience it be administered. Its proper place is in immediate succession to true penitence. Neither do we hold it as *nonessential*, (willing as we are to say it is *nonfundamental*.) We deny that it sustains any necessary connexion with religious privileges in a church, except what is *indirect*, growing out of the influence it has upon one's holiness. Baptism, like other duties, sustains a relation to christian character; and as far as infidelity or remissness concerning it detracts from that character *so far* it disqualifies for communion, and *no farther*. Let it be enjoined upon every convert on evidence of *piety* and not of *party peculiarity*—on condition of his *believing with all his heart* in Jesus Christ, and not in the *views of a sect*. Let him who deliberately neglects or treats indifferently this ordinance be held as guilty, guilty of disobeying a *positive, plain* and peculiarly *sacred* command. And rejected from the church or its communion, if he is, because it impugns his piety, or shows him guilty of a disciplinary offence, and not from any *fancied* connexion between the outward ordinances which makes the omission of the one necessarily disqualify for the other.

We have dwelt thus long upon this topic, to remove an impression abroad, that God has taken out this subject from among the number of those on which the true saint may err, and yet his errors be made *a matter of forbearance* among the wayward brotherhood. And farther that the truth may be sought in an unprejudiced and prayerful study of the word of God, where views may be compared with views, and argument conflict with argument, before cool, disinterested, and divinely impressed minds. And surely, if we have succeeded in the attempt, it is matter of congratulation rather than uneasiness to all saints. If christians

are satisfied of the truth we have endeavored to sustain, let us be kindly heard, while we plead with them, by all that is endearing in the love of the brethren, and the good of Christ's cause, to lay this subject, which has engendered *so much war* among the churches, war "where worse than blood is spilt," into the common crucible of contested points, there to await the trial of purer light and diviner fire.



## CHAPTER IV.

## OF CREEDS.

II. The Church has departed from Apostolic example, and placed itself in a position from which it must, before the Millenium, retreat, in *aiming at uniformity in all religious doctrines*. In identifying membership with an espousal of all the peculiar sentiments of some one of the schools of Divinity. The Saviour erected his church, and the Apostles preached *Christ crucified*, long ere either Calvin or Arminius, or any of their cotemporary or succeeding speculators upon scripture tenets flourished in the world; or Luther, or Wesley, or any of the multitude of modern reformers had erected their separate platforms of church organization. Apostolic preaching was not *tinctured even*, with that subtle and metaphysical argumentation upon which they alike build. To be sure, Paul reasoned profoundly upon the doctrines. But this was rather to *full grown men*, than “babes in Christ.” He fed with “milk” till they were prepared for “meat.” While his ministrations, as a preacher, were restricted, to the simple story of “Christ crucified,” he reserved for his “Epistles to the churches,” all things more “difficult to be understood.” Strenuously insisting, even then, that they be not made matter of division. “At the first promulgation of the gospel,” says Mosheim, p. 97, “all who professed firmly to believe that Jesus was the only Redeemer of mankind, and promised to lead a holy life, conformably to the religion he taught, were

received immediately among the disciples of Christ ; nor did a more full instruction in the principles of christianity precede their Baptism." The unindoctrinated, and, in most cases, unlettered condition of mind, in those who first embraced christianity, makes this fact doubly certain. Most of them were as unprepared *to digest and become established* in a system of Divinity, as the present heathen converts would be, were they now, in a day, brought to repent of sin, and embrace a *before unheard of Saviour*. It would have been a strange phenomenon—very unlike the rational solemnities of that occasion, had the Apostles, on the day of Pentecost, presented to the three thousand proselytes to their religion, a complicated and fine spun *digest of Christian doctrine*, to which they must subscribe a solemn assent before becoming "united unto them." There were truths, we doubt not, to which they both yielded and professed assent on publicly putting on Christ, but, as we shall presently see, they were far more simple and circumscribed than it is now customary to impose. Equally inconsistent is the practice of modern churches in the imposition upon young converts of their peculiar creeds. Unless it be their object, which is far from what they profess, *to classify the church into separate parties*, according to the different constitution of men's minds, and the prejudices they may have imbibed. And then, the only consistent course would be, to have a common school of doctrine, a season of probation, at least of *some years duration*, in which they might settle their minds, and become established in doctrine, before entering upon a public declaration of it.

When we consider the entire ignorance of most converts, on the points of controversy involved in different church creeds, (to say nothing of the lack

of rational dependance upon any opinions established in impenitence,) and the youth of many who make a public profession of religion, nothing can be more absurd, than for them all to be reined up to a solemn *pledge of support*, as well as profession of assent, to a declaration of doctrine which it required the mind of a Philosopher to originate, and which demands the best thoughts of a profound and well trained intellect satisfactorily to comprehend.

That such a practice is unauthorized may plainly be seen by referring to what we have already said on bible injunctions and Apostolic example. Equally inconsistent does it also appear with the *present professions* and *future hopes* of the Church.

Each Denomination professes to be "the church of Christ"—to stand on the Apostolic platform. All are as ready to admit as we that there should be *but one Church*, and are sanguine in the opinion that this should be *their own*. When souls are converted each thinks they ought to be connected with itself, and views their separation as unnecessary and unprofitable.

If one of these Denominations, it is useless to particularize, is *alone* the *true Church*, built upon *the Apostolic platform*, it sustains the responsibility, by its own professions, of affording *alone* a fold for Christ's sheep. And the question is whether its shepherd shall forcibly close the door upon *a majority* or *any of them*? Let there be no dodging on this point. It is false to urge that we cannot *determine the sheep*, save by the *party tinge* of their fleece—and the *adaptation of their body* to the *little wicket* (wicked) *gate* we have set up to guard the enclosure. To drop the figure, that piety is to be distinguished only by applying the touchstone of either one's peculiar tenets. To urge this is beneath the candor of the most unreasonable. Equally futile is the pretence that all may, if they will,

come to our terms, subscribe to our peculiarities, and conform to our customs. The Christian can never violate his convictions of duty; and for us to ask the pious convert, whom we have failed to convince of the correctness of its articles,—to *come in, over our creed*, to what we believe to be *the only true Church*, is as grossly absurd, as for the keeper of the fold to narrow down its entrance below the demensions of half of his flock, and then *very affectionately (?)* to look down from his seat above it, and tell the exposed and scattered ones,—devoured as they are, by the wolves, without protection,—*how free (?)* is his enclosure, and ready for their entertainment and security.

What undershepherd is prepared to deal thus with any of the sheep and lambs of Christ's flock? Have we, as his servants, any right to enter into it and cull, according to our taste and notions, from the number he has chosen, and deliver over others to even *a brother's hands*, when our blessed master could leave heaven to become *servant of*, yea—*die* for them *all*.

Equally does our *hope* and *prayer* for the future union of all the Redeemed demand of us the rejection of all transfundamental creeds. All saints are looking forward, with *anxious expectations*, and supplicating, *not without hope*, for the speedy arrival of that promised period when there shall be but "*one fold and one shepherd*." The consistency of *this hope* and *prayer* with the present church economy needs to be briefly considered.

Who, that has ever known the emotions of a young convert, will not admit that the period of conversion, with christians, is one of unbroken and undiscemled union. No theological controvercies or sectarian jealousies can divide them then. No *acrimonious disputes* in respect to *forms*, or *subtle distinctions of*

*doctrine* find promotion or welcome in the peaceful bosom of the babe in Christ. There are born into Christ's kingdom yearly, in our land, a mighty host of *soldiers of the cross*—who, (if they were let alone by religious parties, and kept out of the shackles of *the different schools of Divinity*, being taught alone in *rational and impartial religious knowledge*—the aim of which should be “growth in grace,” and the promotion of that “faith which works by love,”) would, present contending factions removing out of their way—march, in successive battalions, over the whole field of strife *undivided*; moving shoulder to shoulder, and heart to heart, in the spiritual combat, union being their *one* watchword, and salvation their united object, they would sweep away forever the distinctions of sect, and level with the ground their array of hostile entrenchments. And this would be but obeying the scripture command “walk in Jesus Christ *as ye have received him*,” and sustaining that principle and spirit of action which grace at first implants, and which it is our most sacred duty and highest privilege to perfect.

But what is the bearing of the present economy upon this result? Is its tendency to *do away* or *perpetuate* present divisions, and the evils consequent upon them?

Behold this same class of young converts whose *feelings, interests*, and, I was about to say, *opinions, are one*,—(they are, or might be, were it not for influences foreign from themselves—at least in every important particular) brought before the altars of the different churches for admission. They are reined up to the necessity of either denying themselves the blessed and attractive ordinances of the Lord's house, or of being torn from each other to take the oath of allegiance to rival and contending parties. And now in a solemn manner, calling upon the name the Lord,

they *profess assent*—and *pledge defence* to opinions, on which the Evangelical world is equally divided, and which have their being in the prominence given to one class of scripture truths over another equally plain and important. And while they affirm “I believe thus and thus,” going over the articles of the Calvinistic or Arminian creed,—many of them being children and the majority of the remainder having had neither time nor research to form a fair opinion,—saying that which is entirely *irrational*, not to say *untrue*. All to which it amounts, in the majority of cases, is a solemn covenant *to labor to believe* that to which they subscribe by every available means, and to *defend it as true* whether, in fact, true or false. And now the party lines are run. — Each separate band is fired with *new zeal*, differing in character from that which fired the soul at an earlier and purer age of their experience, and urges itself forward, repelled from each other, in their diverging courses from the medium line of truth, and attracted also to opposite extremes by their peculiar prejudices, till, in *love and pride of sect*, brotherly attachment and veneration has fled, interests and feelings are alienated, and jealousy and prejudice, leading in their train of blind and bitter enemies, have thrown them at *polar distances* from each other. And yet, all the way along behind these *formidable* and *ever diverging walls*, they cry, as they proceed, to the Lord, that he will *unite* and *make one* his people. What consistency !

And yet there is a common platform of doctrine, on which the saints *are*, and, from the necessities of the case, *must be* agreed. The *centre* of all Evangelical Creeds is *one* ; and widely and diversely as they may throw out their circumferences, they still all encircle alike the *grand fundamental truths of Revelation*. And Paul gives instructions respecting the use which

is to be made of this circumstance. (Philippians 3: 15.) "Let us then as many as be perfect, be thus minded; and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless, *whereto we have already attained*, let us walk by *the same rule* let us *mind the same things*." We are, by this language, required to walk together in things in which we *do agree*, trusting, in such a fraternal and sacred union, that on all points of difference and consequent error, God will, by his Spirit, "lead us into all truth."

The truths on which all true christians harmonize are now, as in Apostolic times, those which are so intimately connected with conversion as to be essential to it. "The following propositions," says Harris, "will be admitted as soon as read: That Christianity, in common with every other system, contains some principles which serve at once to identify and distinguish it; that, as the inculcation of morality is not peculiar to the gospel, its essence must be sought for in that in which it is peculiar; in *being a remedial system*, a provision of mercy for a sinful world, thro' a Divine Mediator; and that as christianity is a provision of mercy, its fundamental truths must be expected to be few and simple if only to be in accordance with its kind and compassionate design."

"But how" continues the same author, "are these truths, few and simple as they are, to be discriminated and determined? Had this question never engaged our attention before, we should naturally adopt some or all of the following methods: We should enquire whether, on a devout and careful perusal of the Gospel as a whole, christians generally have received an identity of impression as to its scope and design; whether it contained within its pages any thing professing to be an epitome or abridgment of the system which it reveals; whether the Apostolic preaching

contained any one leading feature; or whether the question of *fundamental truths* was ever agitated in Apostolic times, and determined by Apostolic authority. Now on adopting this course of enquiry, we not only obtain replies, and these replies not merely agree, but by the unanimous verdict of the orthodox churches, they all prove to be *one*, and that one, the doctrine of *justification* by faith in the atoning sacrifice of Christ.

The commission Christ gave to his apostles was that they should go and preach to all nations "repentance and remission of sins in his name." And from all we read of their preaching, we find them faithful to this one duty. "Christ and him crucified," the exhibition of him as an *all-atoning sacrifice for sin*, accompanied with the associate truths which cluster around, and entwine themselves in the doctrine of the atonement—and which collectively have a bearing upon the conviction, conversion and sanctification of a sinner, was the *all and in all* of Apostolic preaching. It was equally true in Paul's time as now, and no more so, that "this is a faithful saying, *and worthy of all acceptation*, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners." The Galatian church it seems, was, during the Apostolic days, in danger of being led astray from this truth. False teachers had led them to seek "justification by the deeds of the law." Here they were departing from a fundamental truth, they were, by false doctrine, endangering the whole Gospel superstructure, and subverting the platform of salvation. And let us see how an inspired Apostle deals with this error? He represented its author as "preaching *another gospel*," and exclaims, "let him be accused." By taking away the distinguishing characteristic of the Gospel, he had *made it another*—and thus fell under Paul's dreadful anathema. This "accurs-



ed" teacher had no more gone counter to New-Testament requirements than those who demanded circumcision and obedience to the law of Moses to a standing in the Church. The error in both cases is equally palpable; they had their origin together in an unwarrantable attachment to the former economy.— But how differently are they treated! The one was an error not subversive of the Gospel scheme, and is suffered to remain tolerated, till, by accumulated light, and the wearing away of prejudices in which it originated, it was dissipated. While the other is anathematised and dealt with as the bane of christianity.

And it is important farther to observe, that this *confidence in God* through the all atoning sacrifice of the Saviour, and that *love* which it inspired in the heart towards him and his children, is spoken of, by the Apostle, in numerous passages, as the bond of union to Christ and the church. "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing nor uncircumcision, but *faith which works by love.*"\* "Now the end of the commandment is *charity* out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of *faith* unfeigned."† "And this is his commandment, that we should *believe* on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and *love one another*, as he gave us commandment."‡ The Apostle's fellowship and affection seemed to be dependent alone on *these two graces*, as the foundation of all else that is Christian. "After I heard," says he, "of your *faith* in Christ, and *love to all the saints*, I cease not to give thanks for you,"§ "We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your *faith* groweth exceedingly, and the *charity* of every one of you all towards each other aboundeth."

\*Gal. v: 6. †1 Tim. i: 5. ‡1 John iii: 23. §Eph, i: 15, 16.

*Faith and love*, thus seem to be represented as the distinguishing characteristics of true piety and the seminal principles from which spring all the christian graces. And the reason why they are made in scripture the common bond of union among saints is very manifest from their nature. They are what distinguishes christian character—the prominent features of a religion which is “*not of this world*”—and which, when manifest in a brother, draws upon the affections of a true christian with an *unearthly attraction*. While the absence of them leaves one, no matter how great may be his professions, out of the reach of this divine sympathy. So that while a church, built purely on this apostolic principle, resting its foundation upon the sure corner pillars of faith in Christ, and love of the brethren, while it furnishes a sure and peaceful and delightful home to *all the Redeemed*, would be a most unwelcome, as well as inaccessible place to those unregenerated.

Christ has taken special pains, while he has provided a fold for *all his sheep*, with an entrance broad enough for their admission, to render it inaccessible and unattractive to the goats. He has set a watchman before its threshold to cry in the hearing of all that approach, “*repent ye*, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” And caused to be inscribed over the gate “Except a man be born again he cannot enter.” While within he has instituted and put in requisition a code of discipline (Math. 18: 15—20.) designed to rebuke every sin the moment it is manifest, and either heal the offence, or banish the offender; and at the same time requiring duties and fostering, in all within, a spirit, to which none but the true saint is competent, and making its pleasures such as none others can relish; thus effectually securing it against all that are unregenerate.

God has thus placed before us a divine model ; a church composed at first of "those that believed"—augmented afterwards by "such as should be saved"—and brought under such sacred strictness of sincerity of heart and holiness of life, that "*of the rest durst no man join himself unto them.*" And while the entrance to the church was so open to all that was good, and closed against all that was evil, the *way out of it* was equally *repulsive to the true saint*, and attractive to the hypocritic and intruder. The whole arrangement of the Apostolic Church was thus, from its very nature, tending to purity.

How far has the Modern Church departed from this holy and heavenly pattern ? In over attention to the ceremonials of its worship, how much has it overlooked the realities they prefigure ? Intent upon the minor points of doctrine, which *distinguish a party*, how sadly has it trifled with those 'weightier matters' which constitute christianity !—Alas, in 'straining at a knat' at the gate of its enclosure, with its *fine spun* and gauze wrought creeds, many a camelo-error has slipped by, mantled in the attractive garb of party, unobstructed.

But it will be expected, ere we leave this branch of the subject, that something more definite be said of what the scriptures and the responsibilities of the age demand in the way of reform. It has been urged by some that the scriptures authorize no creed but the bible. That the doctrines and precepts of the New Testament, unexplained and undefined, should be only employed to test the faith and witness the confession of the sentiments of the church. This view is rendered plausible by the fact, which none we apprehend will question, that Christ and the Apostles at first employed no other. And therefore their intro-

duction bears the aspect of an innovation. We are disposed however to consider this authority insufficient to set aside all declarations of sentiment by the church. We view bible precedent, in regard to creeds, in the same light as in regard to the relative place of baptism and communion, exhibited in a preceding chapter. The bare fact, that, in the first age of the christian church, no written creed existed, does not alone prove that none ever should exist. The will of the lawgiver must be consulted ; and if this fact evidently does not exhibit that will, but only the result of circumstances which themselves account for the fact stated, the conclusion is unwarranted. The only reason why creeds are now formed, or, at least why liberal saints approve and continue them, did not then exist: the indefiniteness of the general idea which men receive from the bible, and the various and conflicting constructions put, by different individuals, upon the same texts. Not that we would say the bible is not definite and intelligible on all points of doctrine and duty ; or that man can improve upon the diction of the inspired volume. But that men have perverted the sense of scripture, and so warped its true meaning, in their different interpretations of it, that to state one's sentiments in *mere scripture language*, instead of 'witnessing a good profession' as is required, might be only a proclamation of any, or each of the semi-infidel errors which are boldly embraced by multitudes ; who, although enemies of true religion, profess to be believers in the bible, and ask no better boon below than to be numbered and fellowshiped with the Saints.

That the Savior did not design to distinguish between true christian principles and such sentiments, utterly subversive, as they are, of his designs, no one will urge. And equally evident is it that he required

the continuance of that distinction in the church. We are exhorted to 'witness a good confession,' to 'contend stedfastly for *the faith* once delivered to the saints.' Faith, if it is not the embracing of those sentiments themselves, was an exercise of the heart founded upon the embracing of Evangelical sentiments—or the doctrine of salvation from sin through faith in Christ Jesus—and the connected truths which are inseparable from it. And the exercise of faith we find made a *term of salvation*, the sure reason why it should be made a *term of communion*. Hymenius and Alexander, Paul represents as having *made ship-wreck concerning faith*, and therefore excommunicated.—And Timothy is admonished that "in the latter times some shall *depart from the faith*, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils," and again of others, of corrupt minds, who were "*reprobate concerning the faith*," but 'should proceed no farther.' Peter also speaks of some that they would 'bring in *damnable heresies* even denying the Lord that bought them;' and, in another place gives directions how they shall be treated "An heretic after two or three admonitions reject."

From the nature of the case, equally as from scripture, the necessity of distinguishing between true and false sentiments, those which *sustain* and those which *subvert* the foundation Christ has laid, is apparent. And this is all that should be attempted in a religious creed. That man is *drifting rudderless*, 'tossed about by every wind of doctrine,' who attempts to separate conversion from the doctrines of the cross, as though it was independant of them; and talks of *piety* without any reference to *opinion*. He is a *blind leader of the blind*; and facts, as well as scripture, show that he and all his blinded devotees are fast tending to 'the ditch.' Such looseness of sentiment robs

religion of all theory and eats out its vital principles.

An appeal to facts we think would speak loudly on this point. The expedient of rejecting all creeds, and making church fellowship to stand on mere experience and deportment, in the first place, opens a door to *something more than the converted*. Because one of the three witnesses, who should testify in the case of the candidate, has his testimony refused. For sentiment evidently, from the influence it exerts upon one's heart and life, is a criterion not to be set aside in so important a decision. Again, this expedient tends to unsettle the minds of true christians on doctrines which lay at the foundation of christian character, and thus to subvert personal piety and usefulness. Not that established creeds do, or ought to bind the minds of those who subscribe to them, within their prescribed limits. *Free discussion and liberty of conscience*, on all doctrines, should be freely indulged. But, by making the distinction which has been mentioned, they afford all necessary guards against such dangers, and hold up a beacon light over the precipice of apostacy, to warn the unguarded wanderer whose footsteps stumble upon its verge. Again, the creed of the New Testament—the bare text without explanation and undefined, instead of being what the advocates of this expedient, as well as all others, admit a declaration of sentiments should be, *an exposition of one's faith*, a means of *communicating* our opinions—becomes a *cloak for one's belief*, a means of *concealing* his doctrinal views. What definite idea do we gather of a man's opinions on religious truth from the mere assertion that *he believes in the Bible?* or in the *particular parts* of that book which any individual may select? Who does not believe in the Bible? and if in the whole, in all the parts of that whole? If, in publicly professing this, the object

is only to distinguish one's self from a Pagan, a Mahomedan or Atheist, and to take common ground, in sentiment, with all that thus, in the general sense, are called *christians*, this is the direct course to secure that end. But if it is to profess Evangelical sentiments, and a new birth, how far short does it come of its object? Need it be farther said that the tendency is, where no definite religious sentiments are professed, that none will be possessed? Or, if one becomes established in the truth, he will be constrained to do violence to the claims of that truth, lest it should grate too roughly upon the ears of the heterogeneous multitude enrolled among the brotherhood.

Equal objections stand against the common principles which control the formation and use of creeds in the Church. To make them THE RULE OF FAITH is certainly an unscriptural device. The Bible is the only rule of faith for Protestants. And this seems like putting creeds on a level with, or in the place of the Bible. Creeds, as they are usually employed, are objectionable for the following reasons, says a late writer in the Union Herald: (1.) "They are generally made by *the few* and enjoined on *the many*. (2.) They are made by *one generation* of men for *all coming generations*. (3.) It is expected that they will be implicitly subscribed to, by those who have not heard them discussed, nor carefully considered them. (4.) They are made tests of church membership although containing articles in respect to which it is conceded *christians* may differ. (5.) It is accounted disorderly for a member of a church to question the correctness of his creed, so that, if it contains errors, there is little chance for their correction. (6.) The creed, or fixed sentiments and usages of a Denomination, are frequently dictated by a single individual, who founds the sect; and to question his infallibility,

in ages afterwards, is commonly considered as schismatical, in a Protestant, as it would be in a Catholic to question the infallibility of the Pope. The Catholic creed maker's age is limited to seventy years, and his successor bears rule; but the *Protestant* one is clothed virtually with an existence for centuries! (7.) Not only are the members of a sectarian church prohibited from altering or expunging any item of their inherited creed, but it is found almost impossible to add a needed item to it which might exclude some newly discovered or newly introduced evil. It is needless to spend time in proving that all such creedism is wrong."

It will be seen, that the wrong and difficulty exists not in *having declarations of sentiments*, but in the use which has heretofore been made of them. They existed, if not in Apostolic times, in the times of their immediate successors in the Church, but in a much more simple and circumscribed form than those which now obtain.\*

Their eye then rested upon one object only, in the formation of a creed, it was to designate the fundamental doctrines of religion. Waddington, in his

\* The following is the only creed which was used in the first three centuries of the church, if we credit the testimony of Historians:

"I believe in God the Father Almighty, the Maker of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ, his only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried. The third day he rose from the dead, he ascended up into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty, from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy Catholic or Universal Church; the communion of Saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting."



Church history, says—‘The confession of faith of the first christians comprised only that which was held necessary to salvation.’ Let churches now make out declarations of faith on the same principle. Let us have a purely *evangelical* bond of union for the church. Let Zion throw off her party badges of distinction, and return to Apostolic simplicity in her form of church organization. Is the question asked to whom the business of framing a creed shall be entrusted? We answer, to the *individual churches* themselves.—No single individual or ecclesiastical body should attempt the framing, for the christian world, a common declaration of faith. Such an attempt would prove as abortive now, as it ever has done, when heretofore made. Let the churches, as they are, make the attempt, and, we doubt not, the formation of such an instrument is practicable. If this determination is fixed, in the spirit of christian love, love and pride of sect giving way, in the heart, to that broader and more catholic affection which embraces the whole household of faith, and each church may safely have left to itself the responsibility of designating what is *fundamental truth*, and must therefore enter into a purely evangelical creed. It would not be expected that there would be no variations in the conclusions to which they would arrive, were the churches, with their different views and feelings, to now test the experiment. But those variations would be so slight as to impose no formidable barrier to union.

We insist upon the distinction between fundamental and nonfundamental doctrines in religion—that it be acknowledged and regarded. And, if this is done, christians will surprise themselves at the unity of their conclusions. Agreement in doctrine would be as perfect, among the saints now, as among the early

christians. And as they 'dwelt together in unity' why may not we?\*

Is it objected that a distinction cannot be made between fundamental truth and that which is not fundamental? That men do not and cannot agree where the proposed line shall be drawn? Admit this, and does it argue against the reality of such a distinction, the fact that this line does exist? If so, then few truths are established, and little, that is accredited as fact, deserves credence. Men agree on little of what we fully believe, and act upon, as truth. And he that waits for universal consent to all he has reason to believe he should pursue, especially in regard to moral enterprises, can never move at all. We do not expect all men to agree on this point. It is a question not for the world, but for the Church. It concerns only the genuinely converted—the *blood washed* company. Do *they* urge that the *terms of salvation* are not fully determined, because men differ in regard to them, and even professed christians are far from designating them alike? (A wide difference of opinion exists in regard to what character is requisite on earth to se-

\* "The confession of faith," says Waddington, "of the early christians, was delivered to children, or converts, by word of mouth and intrusted to their memories. Moreover, in the several independent churches the rule of faith was liable to some slight changes according to the opinion of the Bishop presiding in each. Hence it arose that when the creeds of these different communities were compared together they were found to contain some variations; this was natural and necessary. But when we add that these variations in no instance involved any question of essential importance, we advance a truth which will seem strange to those who are familiar with the angry disputes of later ages. But the fact is easy to be accounted for. They were not curious to investigate that which is not clearly revealed, but adhered firmly to what they knew to be true.—Therefore their variations were without scism, and their differences without acrimony."

cure an entrance into heaven.) No—The Evangelical church professes to be agreed on this subject.—Equally, if they would acknowledge it, are the saints agreed on what constitutes fundamental doctrine.—That agreement might not extend to forms of expression, and to every particular in the outline, but, *in the main*, it would harmonize. This plea is but an effort to dodge the question. We demand that this distinction, existing already in the minds of the church, be frankly made and fairly exhibited. The sincerity of those offering the pretext, that to draw this line is impracticable, is impeached, till they make the attempt, and failing of getting a perfect line, they rest contented only with the nearest approximation to it possible. Till they do this, we are compelled to believe this pretext is employed only as an excuse for the popular custom of binding *others* consciences by *our* faith, and making our *peculiar notions* of truth the standard for a world.

A word will here be expected on the use to be made of such a declaration of sentiments. It should be a record of the opinions of the church on the great doctrines of the Bible, subject to future repeal or revision, when, in any article, it should be found erroneous or incomplete, in the opinion of the church. No scriptural or rational objection can be raised against such an exposition of views. And it should be forced upon no individual, who might differ, in any particular, from his brethren, nor made a *decisive test* of membership. *The fact of having a creed* does not make a church *sectarian*. Facts show churches to be equally sectarian *without* as with creeds. It is the adopting of some *other test* of membership besides *piety*, that makes a body of christians *a sect*. Or else it is by identifying itself with peculiarities of sentiment or custom which are repugnant to the great

body of the faithful, and pleasing only to a particular class of professors. This creed should be made the foundation of a critical examination of every candidate for the church, and of constant instruction and exhortation afterwards. Not that it should take attention from the Bible. But rather draw attention to it. To its 'weightier matters,' its essence, its soul, rather than to the gleaning of proof, or gathering of food for principles and prejudices which distinguish a party.

It should bring together in a condensed and definite form, those truths which conduce to repentance, and entwine themselves in, and form a part of that faith which ensures the soul's salvation, and thus constitute the foundation of christian character. Thus it should be made an associate test, with *christian experience* and *external deportment*, to decide upon one's fitness for the church,—or, in other words, his acceptance with God. It should be made one of *the three witnesses* which should give testimony in so important a case; and it will give in evidence not to be overlooked or treated with indifference in the decision. The testimony of *one* of the three witnesses may be quite unsatisfactory, and still the superior force of that rendered by the other two so far excel what is common as to amply recompence for it. So that we cannot say one is not worthy of a place in the church because he is erroneous in sentiment, in some particular, or his christian experience is unsatisfactory, or his deportment is partially defective. It must be a decision made up from the result of *all* these sources of evidence that will be correct and scriptural. The only question to be settled ever being—is the individual *a new creature*, a converted man, one *accepted of God*.

## CHAPTER V.

## OF DISCIPLINE.

We come now to another point of comparison :

III. The Church has deviated from the Apostolic Model in *the principles and character of its Discipline*. This error naturally grows out of the one we have already described ; as a Church always carries into its government and discipline the principles which regulate the reception and rejection of members. Indeed the principle of rejection is the same as excision. The one applies to an applicant for membership, rejecting him from the privileges of the Church, and the other to one now in fellowship, dooming him to the same exclusion. Consequently the reasons which are considered sufficient to justify the shutting out of the candidate, will also be judged of sufficient weight to warrant the exclusion of one already received. If certain deviations on doctrine, or difference in religious practices, no matter how trivial they may be, or rational, or consistent with holiness, may bar one from the Church and its ordinances, rendering him disqualified, in the eyes of his christian brethren, for fellowship, so also, for the same reasons, the same views embraced, or the same practices indulged, in a brother of the Church, would require his exclusion. And if a people become so devoted to the interests of a sect, and so blinded by party zeal and rivalry, attached to *the letter*, but regardless of *the spirit* of New-Testament requirements, as to make qualifications for partisanship paramount to fitness for heaven, the same principles and spirit will govern also their internal regulations.

We will now notice briefly the carrying out of this

spirit of party, in the discipline of the Church, in contrast with that sanctioned by Inspiration. We have there, in connexion with the pointed and repeated injunctions, already quoted, to union and concord among the saints, *all the saints*, requiring of them, by all that is sacred, to be "of one heart and one mind," the direction—"Mark them that cause divisions and offences" as special subjects of censure and discipline. Such are there required *to be avoided* as carnal and idolatrous, 'serving not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly.' How does this compare with the prevalent spirit of the Churches? Who is eulogised and honored like the devoted and successful champion of a party? That man is esteemed great, who is *great with his sect*, and to be great with that he must be a successful combatant in the arena of denominational strife, where party strength is tested in the decisive encounter, their champion depending, for his glory, upon the weight of his heel on the neck of his prostrated antagonist.

Learned Doctors and Sage Divines make themselves *immortal*, with a faction of the universal brotherhood, sainted as "defenders of the faith," for acts on account of which, in the spirit of primitive piety, they would have been disciplined as disturbers of the peace of Jerusalem, creators of *discord among brethren*. Instead of exposing to censure in the Church, party spirit and sectarian efforts, than which the early saints recognised no more heinous faults, have become a covert for guilt, a kind of recompense that makes up for other delinquencies. How many and liberal pardons have been purchased, for crimes committed, and reproaches brought upon Zion, by bartering wealth, influence and party zeal at the complacent tribunal of sectarian feeling? How often does the rich and influential professor of religion, provided he can defy le-

gal evidence and condemnation, hide himself, under *interest of sect*, from censure and degradation, which would fall without mercy upon the head of one *poor* and without influence? And all simply because *his* loss will weaken *the party*. Generally what error of sentiment or practice, provided it is held in subservience, finds either notice or rebuke? Who does not know that it is not practically considered criminal to err, provided one will *conform* to the *usages of a party*, even to the doing of violence to conscience and what seems to be *the voice of God*. One never becomes a heretic, in the judgment of the Church, in the setting aside of any vital principle, so long as his life dishonors not the party, and his *sectarian orthodoxy* is unimpeached. But let him be judged unsound in *this* and no apology remains for him, in allegiance to God, or devotion to the interests of dying men. He is at once cast off as an apostate and dreaded as a moral nuisance.

But this is not the only particular in which party divisions have subverted the primitive design of Church organization. The Apostolic Church, liberal as it was in respect to errors of opinion not subversive of piety, was far from being loose in either doctrine or discipline. They not only made the promotion of discord, and every scismatical movement, disciplinary offences (an elevation of excellence at which the saints of our day may look up with holy emulation, and blush with shame at its own fallen condition, in this particular) but also required, as necessary to the continuance of Church relation, the maintainance of the spirit and power of godliness. Paul speaks to Timothy of a class of individuals "having *the form* of godliness but denying *the power* thereof," and directs that he should "from such turn away." Fellowship should not be held with such practical Atheists. The

Church then evidently expected, yea required that its members should "walk in Jesus Christ as they received him." That every true convert would "grow in grace" and make progress in holiness. This was to be his business, and the Church was constituted as the sole nursery of personal piety. He connected himself with it with the definite understanding that it was to be his helper in making divine attainments.—To loose then the simple and sincere spirit of love and devotion, which the young convert feels, and the spirit stirring, soul subduing power of religion in the heart, which at that day alone gave evidence satisfactory of a new birth, was, at once to bring into question the reality of one's adoption, the genuineness of his experience, and lead to efficient labours to reclaim or excind him.

But alas, how has this glorious feature departed from the Church! Not that Religion has ceased to be the same living principle, or that the same fostering care and rigid discipline is not necessary to keep alive and deepening its flame. Or that God has taken off from the Church the opportunity or responsibility of all or even more than the early saints carried out and enjoyed, enhanced as have been the facilities of religious instruction and improvement. But other and carnal desires now engage its attention, and motives unhallowed prompt in its efforts. The "race" has changed from one *for heavenly* to one *for earthly* glory. The combat from one of *spiritual*, to one of *rival* conflict. The saints standing not, as formerly, a spectacle to the moral universe, rejoicing at his conquests, by the blood of the Lamb, over *spiritual wickedness*, all heaven rejoicing, and giving glory to God, at his wonderful triumphs—but arrayed against an opposite faction in the Church—brother warring with brother for masteries. Hence new weapons have



to be prepared, and new discipline employed very unlike that of Christ's kingdom in an earlier and purer age; and quite unbefitting the place where they are to be employed. "The weapons of our warfare" saith the Apostle, "are not carnal but spiritual." How false, in point of fact, would be such a sentiment, announced by existing denominations of christians!—Hastened may that day be when the armies of our conquering Redeemer may, in truth, write out *again* upon their banners this divine motto. Till then they are doomed to defeats, and those most disgraceful, as well as disastrous; because dealt out in *fratricide*, brother destroying brother. "He that taketh the sword," in these unholy and carnal contentions, "shall perish by the sword." And that sect fiercest for the conflict, and the most unyielding in the contest, will be the first to bury themselves and their unholy cause amid the ruinous heaps of the battle field. *To yield is to conquer*, to *give ground* the sure means of *gaining it*. When this lesson is again, in the Church, fully learned, and reduced to practice, then will the sure har-binger of the Millenium have appeared.

It is evidently the diversion of the mind from the true design of association with the Church, the making of attainments in spiritual things, to the promotion of party objects, that has sunk so low the standard of holiness. Who does not know that it takes less piety to live in the Church than was at first considered requisite for admission? How many now pass on uncensured among *the brethren*, who would not venture to propose themselves to the Church, if, with present evidence of their piety only, they were out of it; and whom the associate members would not hesitate to refuse if they were to offer themselves? As it is, good morals, and reputable character secure from censure, and give a quietus to fears of deception, when

one has once passed the ordeal of examination initiatory to the Church. Not that these are held sufficient to entitle one to Church privileges; they are not so considered when the candidate proposes himself, nor afterwards, did we judge by the *professions* that are required, but nothing higher is demanded to maintain ones standing. And we should suppose that progress in piety, attainments in divine things, was not made a matter of *very serious concern*; or certainly of *indispensable* church requirement. Far, very far is this from Apostolic precedent, and from customs which must precede and secure the millennial purity and holiness of the Church.

But this laxness of discipline and neglect of religious attainments is nothing accidental in the case. It is a false plea that attempts to evade our conclusions by urging that these evils are not incident to party divisions in the Church, and would fain to seek the removal of them by other means than the doing away of sects. They are the necessary result of disunion among saints. Such is the constitution of man that till some new order of things is produced, which the present economy is the farthestest possible from tending to produce, opposite interests and conflicting prejudices, such as sustain these divisions, will originate jealousies, clashing of feelings and opposition of efforts, and draw into their unhallowed employ the worst of means and the wickedest spirit. Thus at variance, men will become equally blind to the faults of partizans and the virtues of opponents, the love of sect overbalance the love of true holiness, and partiality to a partizan, from selfish ends, violate the demands of spirituality. The Church must be one in mutual recognition, as well as affection, ere it can be freed from these destructive evils. So long as each denomination labours to sustain its separate standard and party position, (in re-

gions where the population is spare the evil is more manifest) to secure *the end*, there is *a kind of necessity* for such means. To relax at all in rigor on points which distinguish the party, and exercise liberality in sentiment, endangers sectarian landmarks and threatens to annihilate the distinctions in which each alike prides itself. And, on the other hand, rigid discipline upon *the heart and life* of Church members may disaffect such as sustain, by their influence and contributions, the struggling efforts of the party; and they be thus thrown off into rival societies, which stand ever ready to make overtures calculated to secure them. In the same way all hearty espousal of the benevolent enterprises of the day is prevented. It would endanger the success of the sectarian efforts of the Church, and disappoint its paramount ambition, to espouse any cause heartily, however sacred or imperative may be its claims, so long as it is unpopular with any considerable number on whom rests the support of the Church. Thus the Church is manacled and handcuffed, by party, preventing effectually its meeting the demands of Heaven, and responsibilities, which it alone sustains, involving the eternal destinies of man. And, however indifferent it may seem, to a mere careless observer of present prospects, the Church is beginning to feel and to realise the effects which have been described, as they have never been seen to develop themselves before, and to struggle for liberty with nerve and resolution which will not long prove ineffectual. The Church will soon discover the *guilt* as well as corruption which necessarily accrues to sectarian divisions, and enter upon speedy repentance and reform.

But, it may be asked, what rules of discipline may safely and scripturally be adopted which promise to be measurably free from the evils delineated?

While we are liberal and catholic, in the principles and spirit with which we keep the door of the Church, we should be equally so in its internal regulations and government. The great Protestant principle, that which was adopted by the Reformers of Luther's day, and which then disenthralled the Church from Papal usurpation, must still be employed for the deliverance of Zion. We should make sacred to every individual member, having satisfied ourselves, on his admission, of his being a child of God, the *inalienable right of private judgment*—the privilege of reading the bible *for himself*, and of acting in conformity with the opinions thus formed. We should have every opportunity or privilege desired to convince him of error, and thus to reform him. But his sentiments should have no influence in bringing him into censure or discipline in the Church, only as they bring into question his christian character. If he embraces an error which gives evidence, to the Church, that he has been deceived in his hope, and that he is not a subject of grace; and propagates it with a spirit scismatical and wicked, endangering thus the purity of the Church, he should be labored with, and if not reclaimed, excluded. But his condemnation should then be understood to rest upon his *lack of piety*, and not on any error of opinion. Our duty evidently is to live in peace and fellowship with all the members of God's household, because they sustain to us, by a new and spiritual birth, a fraternal relation, till they give us evidence that their adoption is spurious, or their heirship has been forfeited with our common Father.

The Church has evidently assumed a prerogative which Christ its head never delegated to it, in setting up jurisdiction over the consciences of acknowledged saints, and *lording it* over their sense of duty.—And this ecclesiastical tyranny seems the more strange,

when we consider how precisely it is adopting the assumptions of the Pope, who alone ever had the hardihood to assert boldly such a right, and all the efforts of Protestants have been built upon the denial of any such authority. The Reformation started with this, and yet we, who are professing to be still carrying it forward, seem now to be turning back to the very principles we so decidedly condemn.

We see also that a decided and *important* change will need to be made, in the application of reproof and authority, when the Church is threatened with distraction and difficulty growing out of division of sentiment among its members. If the principles we have labored to establish be correct, then the crime of *scism* is not attributable to the *zealous*, although sincere, efforts of an individual, acknowledged to be a christian, who labors to promote the prevalence of principles, and the adoption of measures, disapproved and unpopular with the majority (provided the spirit he manifests and the means he uses be lawful and scriptural) but rather to him, be he who he may, that would rob such a brother of his natural and religious right, and attempt to coerce him to neglect doing what his own sense of duty the most imperiously demands. It is true, if the enthusiasm of such an individual should lead him to become violent and denunciatory, beyond what accords with the spirit of the gospel, or to himself become the aggressor, endeavoring to force others to a compliance with *his* sense of right, contrary to *their* honest opinions, *he* then deserves censure; but only on the same ground of him who, as his opposer, attempts to eject him from the Church, because, by telling what he believes to be the truth, or doing what he considers to be his duty, as an individual, *he offends his brethren*. To *embrace sentiments odious* in the eyes of the brethren, or *adopt*

*customs appearing to them unscriptural*, or bring up *exciting topics*—things fraught with the chief mischief in this day of commotion,—is not acting the part of a heretic or scismatic (which denotes the same character, as is employed by the term,) but *to make war among the brethren* because of these things. “Heresy” denotes, literally, “an option or choice”—and is used in scripture commonly in a bad sense, signifying *a special preference* in doctrinal views, which renders one obstinate and tyrannical in respect to his sentiments. On this account it became synonymous with the word “sect,” which primarily involves the idea of division, whereas *heresy* only involves it by implication, denoting a state of mind which is the prolific source of all division. “Heresy,” thus understood, is the great sect-generator that has bred all the numberless factions which have desolated the Church, and rent piece meal the body of Christ. The table then is turned, in the application of this justly opprobrious epithet; and the term *heretic* appears to belong, not to him who perchance is not called *unsound in doctrine*, by his *more orthodox* brethren, (who pity his weakness, and still recognise him as a child of God) but to *him* rather who would make a *bar* of this fancied error, and thus thrust from his arms a brother in Christ.

It will be seen, by these remarks, that peace is to be sought and maintained, in the Church, by inculcating *forbearance* rather than *obstinacy*. In healing the turbulence of the *difficult* and *complaining*, when this spirit vents itself against the acknowledged saint, rather than in restraining, by threats or discipline, his honest and pious efforts.

Does the question arise, where then is the responsibility of the Church in respect to maintaining purity of sentiment among its members? We answer, Christ

never laid upon it any responsibility, in regard to this, only to see to it that all who entered exercised *saving faith*. After this, if one seemed blinded on any point of doctrine, so long as his evidence of adoption remained satisfactory, we discharge every obligation to him or his master, by doing the utmost possible to enlighten and reclaim him from error by reason and prayer. His compassionate Savior gets along with him in his blindness, just as he does with all his children, for "blindness *in part* has happened to (all) Israel," as the most bigoted must readily acknowledge; and, should the *unconscious offender* die, we have none of us any reason to suppose Jesus would not take him to himself. And shall we please *him* or promote the *purity* he demands, by thrusting from our arms one of his "little ones," that, falling, he clasps to his own bosom?

But, while we are liberal with what appears to us, *a blinded conscience*, we should be strict upon a *perverse heart*, and an *unholy life*. Our liberality must never degenerate into licentiousness. But, on the contrary, it must make the preparatory means for elevating the piety, and rendering more efficient the discipline of the Church. In this we can seek no better pattern than we find presented in the example of its Divine Head. "Few" are the stripes he lays upon one *ignorantly* transgressing, but "*many*" upon one '*knowing* his master's will, and *doing it not*.' "If there be first a willing mind," says he, by the mouth of the Apostle, "it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not." Behold, in his dealings with his children, how mildly he passes by our aberrations from duty, provided they are not attended with wilful ignorance and determined obstinacy! How often do christians err and hardly suffer the withdrawal of one ray of the light of his

countenance, because they sinned ignorantly, and their fault only was manifest afterwards in an increase of knowledge and experience? But, when *deliberate disobedience* is indulged, how heavily, upon the soul of the rebel, sinks the weight of the Divine displeasure! No effort can remove, or suffering atone for the guilt, till relief is found in the penitent's tears and the blood of the Lamb. What severity is there in the rebuke Christ gave to an uncharitable spirit in the Church when he spoke to his disciples of *the servant* to whom his Lord had forgiven a debt of *ten thousand talents*, and yet he (a monster of inhumanity) seized upon a *fellow servant*, who owed *him* but *an hundred pence*, and attempted to strangle him into its payment! "Shouldst thou not," saith his Lord, when he was apprehended and brought before him, "have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee?" "*Freely ye have received*" says Christ—yea, and his hourly compassion toward us continually speaks the same divine sentiment, and urges with emphasis the duty he couples with it—"freely give."

But much as we should avoid the false fastidiousness so apparent in the Church, about things in regard to which God is lenient with his people, we should avoid equally the prevalent indifference to things concerning which he is most strenuous. The scriptures are far from sanctioning that looseness of discipline, on what concerns true holiness, which so dishonors our best churches, and neutralizes their efforts. To say the least, we should be contented with *no less* evidence of a converted heart, and of habitual fervent piety, in a regular member, than in a candidate for the Church. And yet to do this, to render indispensable to the continuance of ones connexion with the Church a standard of piety confessedly *so low*, would be to achieve a glorious revolution. To make



real advances in holiness, constantly to "grow in grace" should be expected, yea, *required* in every member. And also, as an important means of religious advancement, direct efforts and personal sacrifices should be required, for the conversion of sinners. No standard of duty or devotion, if the Church really sustains it, can be too high; but it must be consonant with the consciences of all upon whom it is enforced. If it is not so, it will appear equally tyrannical and useless. No plea is here made for relaxing the rigor of Church discipline; it is infinitely too loose as it is; but its rigor should be more properly and rationally applied. The Church must endeavor to draw its restraints as near as practicable in unison with the Divine requirements. Let its discipline restrain where the offender feels that Jehovah's demands restrain; and the admonitions it utters harmonize equally with the dictates of conscience and the voice of God. Then will there be authority in its warnings and weight in its decisions. Connexion with the Church can no longer be treated as a matter of indifference, nor exclusion from it considered no dishonor. Thus the high and holy purpose for which she was instituted may be answered, her departed glory return with its first lustre, and having served the end of her being, the conversion of the world, she will be prepared to hail in white robes the coming of the Bridegroom.

But the question will here arise, where rests the authority of discipline in the Church? By whom shall this prerogative be assumed? In this enquiry another point of controversy is involved which will receive a passing notice hereafter. It is sufficient here to remark that, however much christians may have differed about what should be the *final resort*, in cases of discipline where authority needs to be called in, they have been all agreed in the *preliminary*, and, we think,

*only* authorized steps of discipline. That which Christ, with his own lips, directed as reported by Matthew in the eighteenth chapter of his Gospel. The rule is, if a brother offends, an effort, *private* and affectionate, should be made, by the individual grieved or stumbled, to reclaim him; and if it prove unsuccessful, one or two others should be induced to undertake with him the same kind effort; and finally, when such attempts seem unavailing, the case should be submitted to the Church. Passing by, for the moment, whatever of query may arise about farther procedure, let us observe the fact that all saints coincide in opinion with regard to the duty here enforced. Here is a *common* rule of discipline, so comprehensive in its application, and effectual also, if faithfully, and in a christian spirit, obeyed, as to rarely fail of accomplish the desired end, and thus of superseding the necessity of any other. It is only necessary, in most cases, that there should be substituted, in the place of prevalent unhappy and fruitless disputes about *how* and *by whom* authority is to be employed, after a complaint has come before the Church, (a point on which God has seen fit to give us little or no instruction,) a hearty and persevering effort to secure adherence to what has been so plainly and unequivocally taught.

And yet it must be acknowledged that the gospel contemplates, and the necessities of the case sometimes demand, the exercise of authority. And we must here meet the enquiry, where ultimately rests the authority of approval, censure and exercise? We answer directly, and at once, *in the Church*. The highest and decisive authority rests in the Church itself, in its collective capacity. If the offender refuses to hear the brethren, labouring in an individual capacity to reclaim him, the direction is "tell it to the Church. And if he neglect to hear the Church—let

him be unto you as a heathen man and a publican." Hence Paul directs the Church at Corinth, when they *were gathered together*—"to put away from among themselves that wicked person." And he also in the same connexion, directs them "not to keep company with a brother" (so called) if he be "a fornicator, or covetous, or a railer or a drunkard or an extortioner." These acts of the highest judicial authority they were to do as a local Church in their independent capacity. Is it urged that it was the authority of Paul as a Bishop or Ecclesiastical Governor that directed in these cases? It is evident that the Apostle directed by inspiration and not by personal authority; and that instead of arrogating any supervisory authority to himself, or attributing it to his fellow disciples, he speaks of the power of excision as belonging purely to the Church. That the scriptures authorize no other Ecclesiastical tribunal is admitted by Dr. Scott and other Episcopal Commentators. And it is seriously to be questioned whether the majority of all church members who are under Episcopal and Presbyterian authority do not consider all higher Ecclesiastical judicatories rather the offspring of expediency than bible authority, and *advisory* merely, rather than binding upon the decision of the Church.

The same truth may be exhibited in another view. Which may be best presented in answer to a question sometimes pressed, what constitutes the Church? The answer has already been given in a preceeding chapter. It must be either the whole body of the faithful on earth, or the disciples of Christ of some particular place. It cannot mean the former when employed to designate the board of authority who should adjudicate in all cases of discipline. For the Universal Church could not, in Apostolic, much more in Modern times, be gathered together to consult and deter-

mine. Not even in the persons of Bishops, Elders or delegates, unless (what is most unnatural, as well as false) the limits of the true Church are identified with some one of the contending denominations now so pertinaciously contending for this right. It therefore must have reference to the latter—it must designate individual churches as possessing the full power of ecclesiastical government over its own members. It may not be inconsistent for them to consult the decisions of larger bodies and the wisdom of those more informed and better experienced in the Church than themselves; but all idea of authority above them should be discarded.

If it is necessary, as some are disposed to urge, that union may be effected to unite together under some one universal Ecclesiastical organization, then the Protestants have erred in their controversy with the Romanists. For this is precisely their argument. They say “the Church of Christ is one.” By which they mean—*one in organization*. And placing over it in authority Priests, Bishops, Cardinals and a Pope, as *head over all*, they arrogate to themselves infallibility, and invite to their unerring decisions all questions of dispute concerning alledged heresies or imputed crimes. If there is any authority above that of individual churches it must arise from the augmenting of this authority by adding numbers to those giving in the decision; or connecting with it the weight of some higher Ecclesiastical power. If it is by numerical increase we have no where to stop in getting a correct decision till all the churches have heard and given in their testimony in the case; and then we must make up a decision from the whole verdict. What is perfectly impracticable as well as unauthorized. If by seeking weight of authority in the opinions of Ecclesiastical dignitaries, there can be an appeal to some

Conference of Ministers, to a General Assembly, to Bishops, and why not to Cardinals and a Pope elected by the Cardinals? Where is the authority for the assumed power of any of these that does not authorize them all? If the Priest, Elder, Rector or Pastor may authoritatively control the parish over which he is placed as a spiritual teacher, then the Bishop may equally have a similar control over his diocese, and a Pope over the whole Church as, *God's vicegerent*. If there is any divine authority for the exercise of judicial control over christians, above that of individual churches, then the Romanist has the argument, and all true friends of Union must quickly acknowledge the claims of Catholicism, and submit to the authority of the Pope.

It need not be inferred, from what has been here presented, that no meetings on a more general scale than those of mere local societies should be held. No doubt great advantage may be gained by a mingling of ministers and lay members in provincial assemblies for mutual interchange of sentiment and consultations for the general good of Zion. But it will be seen that they should be *local* and not *Sectarian*. That they should be purely *christian*, without reference to any other distinction, and should be called for towns, counties or states, according as the object to be gained, the business to be transacted, might required. And there can be no reasonable objection why, before such bodies, questions of doctrine and discipline should not be brought, provided, as at the Convention in Jerusalem, all that should be done be *strictly advisory*, and, as it would be under such circumstances, *impartial* as regards all party feelings and objects.

It remains for us to answer one only prominent objection. It is that such a course would exclude all

regular and efficient organizations for the purpose of doing good, and thus seriously retard the conversion of the world. It is not denied that it would demolish all *party* organizations—by which we mean such as are formed on party principles, and for party purposes. And nothing can be more manifest than that such have in themselves the seeds of their own destruction. That same spirit which has separated them from the rest of the christian world, in a partizan scheme of doing good, will, in the same way, ere long separate them from *each other*. But while this may be the result, and we are not unwilling to acknowledge it, we deny that it will oppose any thing to a better, and even *more efficient* organization, voluntary but free, existing between the churches themselves, feeling their responsibility, and by their own vigilance and efforts in their separate spheres, taking the work of benevolence into their own hands, and thus doing away with all the loose and cumbersome machinery of Societies, Agencies, &c. &c. under which the Church now groans. But let us meet the objection directly, and we will do it in the language of an able writer, (Wm. Goodell) who has bestowed much thought and examination upon the subject, in connexion with other humane and benevolent efforts of our day: “(1) God is wiser than man, and he has said no such thing, but (by his express silence) the contrary. (2) It is admitted by all candid men—(Dr. Scott and other Episcopalians among the rest) that the churches of Apostolic times had no such connecting organizations, but no churches have ever been so active, so efficient or so successful. (3) The churches, as a body, have been steeped in spiritual apathy, indifference and inaction just in proportion as christians have thrown off their responsibilities upon complicated organizations, of our own day. (4) The churches of our times which

approximate nearest to independency are certainly not behind their neighbors in activity and moral enterprise. (5) Those who labour to rouse christians to duty find one of the greatest obstacles to be the almost universal propensity to take it for granted that all needful exertions will be made by Central Boards, Ecclesiastical Bodies, &c. &c. without *local* action and individual selfdenial. (6) The principles of mental Philosophy might teach us that those tendencies are inseparable from extended Ecclesiastical organizations."

## CHAPTER VI.

## HOW UNION IS TO BE SECURED.

We come now to the most complicated and difficult point of enquiry. It is one thing to discover and acknowledge the division of the Church to be unscriptural and destructive, and quite another, in the opinion of the public, to point out a correct and effectual way to escape it. Christians generally, in their more candid moments, see and deplore the evils which exist, but despair of doing any thing effectually to remove them. We may presume farther that the majority of saints will approve of the principles, in the abstract, which have now been exhibited, but most of them, it is to be feared, are inclined to stop here, and conclude that all hope and all duty are to be merged in a mere acknowledgement of correct principles, and a passive anticipation of the desired end. So much however cannot be admitted and more still not be felt to be duty. If the principles exhibited are correct they have a binding obligation, in spite of all circumstances, upon individual duty. We are bound to conform, in our conduct, to whatever is *right*, although, in many cases, where others are concerned in the result, the effect may not answer to our efforts. But under such circumstances we have only to faithfully sustain our own responsibility, and, with unwavering faith, confide in God to bring it to pass.

What then may be considered duty for all who in sentiment, subscribe to the doctrines advanced, and ardently desire the Union of the Saints?

1. We must unwaveringly believe that *the end is attainable*; and that God will sooner or later crown with success the efforts of his children to secure it.



Little need be said here to establish this fact; the encouragements of that period's drawing nigh have been already exhibited. It will suffice to say—if the plea is still urged that *the time has not come*, that christians are not prepared for such an undertaking—If we consult *the necessities* of the case, the declaration is untrue; for they not only *urge* but *force* us to the attempt. The Church is suffering incalculably from division, and the desolations which are experienced from it will soon either devastate christendom or work a favourable change. Do we seek encouragements—to the doubting and superficial observer of events who has no eye to trace the silent progress of God's benevolent designs to their termination, here may be occasion of despondency. But to him who walks by faith, and examines thoroughly into the developement of causes of moral changes which are apparent in our day, and who is ready for personal sacrifices to advance the Redeemer's kingdom, there is no deficiency of encouragement. The end is sure, and that end must be secured by *moral means*—hence the time of the *first movement* must sometime come. Is it presumption to consider that it has come *now*? If the people are *not prepared*, when there is such an imperious demand upon their being both *prepared* and *enlisted*, and such fearful consequences evidently awaiting if they are not, is it not time that something was doing to prepare them? And who will bear the cross and the reproach in this undertaking? There are multitudes in the land who are indulging the most sanguine hopes of deliverance to the church from sectarian enthrallment, and from these hopes will arise efforts suited to the magnitude of such a work.

2. We must secure, among christians, a better understanding of their own *individual responsibility* in regard to this work. We must lead them to un-

derstand that it is their privilege and duty to assume, in their connexion with the saints, the position, and sustain the principles which will characterise the Millennial or *united church*. They must be willing to do this at every sacrifice of feeling and ambition which they may be called to make. That retraction and reform will be the stepping stones, sometime, to the issue, none can question. What is to be done it behoves us to do quickly. We have no business to temporise with duties of such magnitude. To do it is to aggravate the mangled body and bleeding wounds of the body of Christ. Is it urged that we must wait till we are better enlightend and more devoted and consecrated, so as to be able to move wisely and safely? What new light have we to expect? Indeed what do we need when we are already convinced of what is right and are retarded rather by notions of expediency than serious doubts about duty? Are we to have a new bible, or is new light expected to fall upon the page of the one now given, to exhibit truths heretofore veiled in impenetrable darkness? The book of inspiration is now complete, even to the day of Judgment; when it is to be opened as the statute by which a world is to be tried. If the Spirit is expected to throw more light upon it—it never can give more than it now proffers, which is to *guide into all truth*. Nothing but our unwillingness to examine, in the light of Eternity, and in the fear of God, into our duty, and submissively to yield to it, prevents our vision being clear, and our path straight before us in this glorious enterprise.

With regard to the piety of the Church now being adequate to such an undertaking, we would not be too presuming. Whatever of difficulty there may be here—and alas how great it is!—of one thing we are certain, that it is growing *no better*. That there is no

cure to be expected from fostering party spirit and sustaining divisions, but decidedly the reverse. But we are not expecting an immediate revolution in the whole body of the Church. We are willing to admit that, as she is, the Church of Christ is unprepared to enter, as a whole, into such an undertaking. The business devolves upon individuals, as always in all moral enterprises; upon such as know and are willing to obey their duty. Are such to become more pious or consecrated by the neglect of obedience? To promote the union of the Saints by bracing up the bars of division through policy? By neglecting to act on impartial principles themselves, will they encourage conformity to that custom in others?

In this matter, as in all others of a moral and religious character, every individual attempting any thing must view himself standing alone before God, and a world which he is to labor to reclaim and to save. And he must think of his influence and labors, however small they may be, independent of all others, and see that they will stand the test of the Judgment, according fully with the will and purposes of God.—We came into the world *alone*, we shall go out of it *alone*, and although a Universe is around us, as it will be at the great day of accounts, yet *now* our accountability is *by ourselves*, as will be our judgment *then*.—That *the Church* will not move with us, or our denomination is opposed, is but a poor excuse for our not occupying correct ground ourselves, *in it* if we *can*, or *out of it* if we *must*.

3. *We must awaken, in the Church, a just sense of the sin and evil consequences of scism.* The professed children of God have no adequate conception of these. They deliberately, and with little compunction, adopt, and carry into practice, principles of Church order and government, which necessarily divorces from it

the majority of acknowledged Saints, robbing them of what they may of right claim from their heirship, and laying the foundation of divisions, jealousies, rivalry and strife, more destructive in their influence than any curse that ever fell upon the Church, not excepting the wars of the Crusaders, and the horrors of the Inquisition. Christ could look with indignation upon him who should "offend" or cause to stumble, "one of his *little ones*." And declared "better that he should have a millstone hanged about his neck and be drowned in the midst of the sea." But alas it seems to christians now to be a light thing to offend, and excommunicate even, all whose impressions of duty and customs in practice correspond not strictly with their own! Apparently not alarmed at the effects of their party seclusiveness in multiplying sects till their name is *Legion*, christians seem regardless alike of even greater calamities which impend. The little feeble embarrassed companies, who, under different names, still are able, in most communities, to hold themselves together, seem to be unmindful that this same centrifugal force, which has already so dismembered the Church, is still active and threatens, as its certain result, to rend to atoms the remnant that remains. This glaring fact, together with all else which ought to alarm and humble the Church, in view of its distraction, must be proclaimed, in thunder tones, in the ears of slumbering Zion. She must be aroused to behold her guilt and her danger. Squandering as she is, her grudgingly bestowed and scanty resources, for party purposes, while dying millions lift imploring hands to her, that they may be rescued, and numberless scoffers point in derision at her intestine broils—exclaiming "behold how these *brethren* hate and devour one another!"

4. There must exist in the United Church, *substantial oneness of Faith*. Public instruction and social improvement are the more prominent objects for which church relation is assumed. How can christians of different sects be persuaded to give up their present organizations, which afford, in a degree, these privileges, for an alliance which will necessarily exclude them? And certainly an outward union among professed saints with *substantially* different, and even *contradictory* sentiments would set these privileges aside. Preaching, in such circumstances, would become angry controversy, and religious intercourse perpetual contention. What true saint could be edified or profited by such a relation? *Substantial* agreement in faith, we see then, is indispensable; while *more than this* is equally impracticable and *unnecessary*. Need it be said that such agreement is already attained, or rather has always existed? That converted men agree on all fundamental doctrines of religion? *Justification by faith* in the atoning sacrifice of the Son of God, with all other truths which this involves, are embraced alike by christians of every name. Their opinions harmonize on every doctrine which enters essentially into the exercise of devotion or of practical godliness. The sermons of eminently pious and useful ministers, and the conversation of their more devotional and faithful members naturally run so exclusively in the channel of *universally admitted* and *all important* evangelical truth, as to be most acceptable and profitable to all christians, and leave no ground for the formation of an opinion to which of the prevailing denominations the speaker belongs. Would truth suffer, or piety, in any degree, decline, if such were, to a greater degree, where the custom now prevails, and *universally*, where it does not, the prevailing rule in addressing public assemblies, and in the devotional exer-

cises of the conference room? Having it understood, at the same time, that the holding of any opinion, on nonfundamental points, and the private inculcation of it, together with corresponding practices, should be the *inalienable right* of every member, his privilege, in no instance, being subject to restraint, save by the manifest limits of *christian principle* and a *christian spirit*? Let no one be startled by the recommendation of this rule, for nothing can be more consonant with the spirit and express commands of the gospel.—And besides, to a certain degree, it is already prevalent in every religious assembly. Let it then be carried out to its proper extent, and Zion will rejoice in the unity and purity she will secure by the expedient.

To secure the *substantial agreement in faith* already shown to be requisite, candidates for admission into the church should be carefully and thoroughly examined in relation to the character of their faith, and a faithful watchcare be kept up over members in fellowship, lest they be swerved to the embracing of some "*other doctrine*," so specious in appearance perhaps, as to deceive, if it were possible, the *very elect*; and yet leaving out the *principle of regeneration*, the germ of all true holiness, so as to justly be looked upon as a "damnable heresy."

The use of a *written creed*, although abused to a mischievous extent, and employed as has heretofore been customary, worthy of the severest criticism, may notwithstanding deserve some place in the usages of the Church. Not to secure uniformity in the opinions of its members, to serve as a *doctrinal gauge*, by which to regulate the consciences of those giving evidence of piety; but to assist in distinguishing between *real* and *spurious* christianity, and to facilitate in the application of *proper doctrinal tests* to professions of piety.

For a creed formed on this principle, with great care and research, and compiled from a comparison of *all the articles* of Faith of existing evangelical denominations, in which is embodied the substance of all, with the denominational peculiarities of neither, the reader is referred to the *FRATERNAL APPEAL to the American Churches, with a plan for Catholic Union on Apostolic Principles*, by S. S. SCHMUCKER, D. D. Gettysburg Col. Pa.

Or to a concise digest of doctrine, by a New England minister, "intended," as he says, "to embrace all the *essential doctrines* of the Gospel, or those general truths in which all Evangelical Christians agree, without reference to their sectarian differences. They are formed on the great principles of *Christian Liberty*, to shut no disciple of Christ away from the privileges of the Church."\*

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### \*ARTICLES OF FAITH AND COVENANT.

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1. We believe, that the Old and New Testaments are a revelation from God, constituting our rule of faith and practice.

2. We believe, that they require us to love God with all our heart, and mind, and strength, and our neighbor as ourselves.

3. We believe that no human being, while in a state of nature, does thus love God, and that all mankind are on that account entirely sinful and under condemnation.

4. We believe, that to redeem us from this state, God the Father of his mere grace, gave his only begotten Son, the Word, which was in the beginning with God, and was God; that the Word became flesh, and in the likeness of sinful flesh, suffered and died on the cross, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

5. We believe, that as many as thus receive Christ, are renewed in their minds by God the Holy Ghost, shedding abroad the love of God in their hearts.

6. We believe, that every one, who has been thus renewed, will manifest it by a godly walk and conversation, and by the cultivation of purity of heart.

5. There must be allowed *freedom of opinion* and *discussion* on all points of difference among those acknowledged pious. That this liberty should be taken with special regard to the feelings of all brethren, the equal right of those differing from us, and the ultimate result, should our course be made an example by all, it is needless here to urge. It is but following the dictates of principles questioned by none. And the *undue* exaltation of any doctrine or duty above others of *equal* and *higher* claims, should be treated as an *irregularity*. A distorted view of truth, a magnified conception of the comparative claims of some *particular command* over other duties, is common to man,

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7. We believe, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust; that God has appointed a day in which he will judge the world, according to their deeds done in the body, when the wicked will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal.

### C O V E N A N T .

You now, professing repentance for your past sins, promise and engage in humble reliance on Divine grace, to obey and serve God hereafter in all things; to submit yourself to the authority of Christ in his church, and conscientiously to walk with us in all the Commandments and Ordinances of the Lord.

We then receive you as a member of the same body with ourselves. And we promise, as God shall enable us, to watch over you with meekness, patience and brotherly love.

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You have this day, before many witnesses, professed a good profession. May you have grace to honor it by an exemplary walk, and adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things; and may you together with us, be built up more and more in the most holy faith, and made partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.

Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power both now and forever. Amen.



and an evil not wholly to be avoided. We may be satisfied with an approximation to its removal. But an attempt, partizany, and pertinaciously, to impose such unnatural peculiarities upon others is schismatical in its character, and worthy of censure. Such evils, however, we should not be too impatient of enduring, incident as they are to the *weakness* of human character, in this *imperfect state*. Understanding too, as we may, that error contending, as it does, in such a desperate struggle, will make but miserable headway against truth, consistently and calmly, but *firmly* maintaining its defence.

Many are the points of controversy among christians, involving sentiments dear to individuals and denominations, because they are their *distinguishing peculiarities*, their *party rallying points*, to relinquish which, or to give up any advantage their present position may afford for their maintainance, would be considered treasonable by their respective votaries. So far as this impression is the result of pure *party spirit*, it deserves no countenance, and should knowingly receive only its just rebuke. But so far as it arises from a commendable love of *what is esteemed truth*, it deserves respect, and should be encouraged.

What then it may be asked has truth to fear from an open, fair and unsheltered controversy with falsehood? What has she gained in centuries past by lurking with her forces in ambush, or covering her front with artificial bulwarks, for fear of the arrows of her equally concealed and entrenched foe? Error, and not truth, *seeks concealment*, and stands in need of human fortresses of defence. *She*, on the other hand, has *light* for her pavilion, and the open field of *free thought* and *unrestrained moral action* for the sphere of her triumphs. "The weapons of our warfare are *not carnal* but spiritual." And if we would be most

successfull in it, we must lay aside all prejudice, and all bigotry, with every carnal and selfish means, we have called in to aid in maintaining our party positions, and thus inducing others to a similar surrender, trust the decision of every controversy to the unaided impressions of God's word and spirit.

What real friend of revealed truth can object to such an arrangement? The confidence of him who disapproves of it, in the correctness of his own principles, is seriously to be questioned. For who, that is fully satisfied with his position, on controverted theological points, does not firmly believe that the true reason why others are not led to the same conclusions is their lack of opportunity to investigate the reasons which have settled his own mind, or the influence of prejudice, or a stubborn determination against conviction, which effectually prevents truth from exerting its proper influence? Then what is to be done to give correct sentiment a complete triumph? The appeal is here made to the zealous partizan that is ready to condemn the plan suggested because it seems, at first, to him, to be cutting off his privilege of labouring most successfully to secure the prevalence of the peculiar tenets he has espoused. If he concedes to this proposed measure, instead of its putting a damper upon his ambition and hopes, it should in the highest degree encourage them. He believes his sentiments are consonant with the word of God. And certainly we have now lit, as he must perceive, upon the only way to secure to that revealed word its true influence. An expedient by which successfully to divest all of those prejudices and other opposing influences which are always in array against truth. If we are in error, and *desire* to remain so, we have just reasons for opposition; if we are willing to be enlightened, we have here the fairest opportunity. If we are

wholly on the side of truth *for ourselves*, we have *nothing to fear*; *for others*, certainly *every thing to hope*; as we shall secure them thus out from behind those formidable prejudices and prepossessions which before so effectually shielded them, in the broad sunlight of truth, and with hearts open and ready for conviction.

6. In connecting with the church, the young convert should be considered, not as *espousing a party*, but as uniting himself, *without partiality, to the whole body of Christ's disciples*. He will, to be sure, be under *more particular* and *stronger* obligations to the local assembly of christians with whom, he is individually associated. But those obligations will arise, not from any *peculiar agreement* among them, in opinion, or partizan compact into which they have entered; but solely from the relation they sustain to each other, as *fellow christians* of the same community, bound to watch over one another in love, to promote mutual edification and profit, and to unitedly labor for the salvation of sinners in their midst. The scripturality and propriety of the adoption of this rule, can be questioned by none, and therefore require no attempt at elucidation. One thought only do our limits permit us to present. It is, that in making any thing more of a public profession of religion—forming a connexion with the church—we not only shock the better and more catholic feelings of young converts, and prevent thus multitudes from associating themselves with the church *at all*; but we deal contrary to the understanding of most candidates, when they are admitted; and put them under bonds, *ignorantly*, which they, at first, before gangreened by the sectarizing policy of the churches, can by no means acknowledge or fulfill. There may be *exceptions* in the case, (although the genuineness of ones conversion

is made questionable when he permits himself to be an exception,) yet the vast majority of young converts when they take upon themselves church obligations, and are publicly 'numbered with the disciples,' understand themselves to be forming a connexion with the *whole church*, and not a *faction* of it; and that their relation is to secure them the *undivided* sympathy, and fellowship, and immunities of the '*household of faith*.' Perhaps these impressions may be vague and very indistinct in the mind, but this fact neither renders doubtful the *reality* of their existence, nor excuses the practice of clandestinely imposing upon their just claims. How wicked the practice, when the young convert bows his willing neck to the 'easy' and befitting yoke of catholic christianity, and brotherhood with all the saints, to *stealthily* throw over it the *noose of a party*; and lead the victim, blinded to his real condition perhaps, (and his unconsciousness of the fact, instead of excusing only *aggravates* the guilt of those who have practised the delusion upon him) a slave to party; his conscience surrendered to the keeping of his denomination, and his fellowship and usefulness confined to the limits of his sect.

In assuming an impartial position, taking that catholic stand which is necessary to the union of the saints, it appears manifest that members of churches at present existing, instead of coming in to assert rights they have ignorantly bartered away, only conform to obligations which, expressed or implied, were acknowledged when they entered into church relation. They *break* no covenant vows, by the act, but virtually fulfill them—vows which every new born soul makes at the time of his espousal to God, and his entering into heirship with all the blood washed company, and which he more publicly recognises when he enters into visible church relation. Instead

then of professed christians being under *covenant obligations* to be the servants of a party, with which they are nominally associated, they are under covenant obligations *not to be*; for this was the vow made by them, to the great head of the church, when they entered it, and in which their brethren tacitly acquiesced.

7. *Baptism*, with all other rights and duties which are not indispensable to christian character, must not be considered *a condition of membership*. It is most obvious that so long as a great portion of the church look upon the remainder as not having been *scripturally baptised*, if they celebrate the supper with them as they are, or hold them as *brethren* in the church with themselves, they must do it without reference to baptism. They must lay aside all *terms of communion* and *conditions of membership*, except evidence of Christ's adoption; a mutual acknowledgement of each others baptism being neither asked nor expected, as it would be alike *unnecessary* and *impossible*. On the one hand there must be secured a conviction that *not baptism—but Christ is "THE DOOR of the sheep."* And that if any man *enters in by him*, if, in the opinion of others, he has not scripturally, in baptism, made a public profession of it, yet if he has confessed Christ *at all*, and publicly espoused his cause, he may properly be recognised as a church member.—On the other, there must be a willingness to be satisfied with such a recognition. To not ask what can neither be *consistently* given, nor reasonably accepted if it were, the fellowship of *their baptism*, but of *their hearts*, a simple recognition of *christian character*. Baptism has its place, and that an early and important one in the instituted means of grace. But that our Savior built his church upon it exclusively, and has so appointed to his followers, is an unwarrantable con-

clusion from what he has said. *Genuine faith* in him, as the *only condition* and a decided public profession of it, no matter how made, he has plainly shown us, is *the accepted means* of becoming connected with his church below. Says he to the disciples, at a certain time, when he had gathered them as his little church around him, imparting to them, as he was wont to do, needful instruction, "Whom do men say that I, the Son of man am?" And they said 'Some say John the Baptist; some Elias; and others Jeremias, or one of the prophets.' He said unto them, 'But whom say ye that I am?' And Simon Peter answered and said, '*thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.*' This *firm faith*, exhibited by the intrepid Simon, and the decided and public profession of it he here made, was peculiarly satisfactory to his divine Master, and now he turns it to special account. "Blessed art thou Simon Barjona; for flesh and blood have not revealed it unto thee; but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, thou art Peter," indicating that his name was most indicative of the firmness of his faith, "and upon *this rock*" i. e. this manifestation of faith, and confession of me, "I will build my church, and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it." Christ here plainly indicates that the foundation on which he was afterwards to erect his *spiritual temple* was not, St. Peter *in person*, nor baptism as an emblematical ordinance, but a public recognition of Christ as the Savior, and profession of faith in his name.

8. It may seem superfluous to add, *the same liberty of conscience should be granted to the administrator, as to the subject, in the ordinance of baptism and other religious rites.* If the candidate was the only individual having a responsibility involved, we should have answered the full claims of christian liberty

when *his choice* is given him, his views of duty complied with, in the method adopted. But another individual has a commission, from divine authority, to execute in the case. He has a conscience then to be consulted in the act, whose authority, if he acts at all, must not be trampled on. If the administrator happily recognises as valid the "mode of baptism" selected by the applicant, then no farther difficulty accrues. But if he view it as falling short of answering the design of the institution, and therefore not valid, then he, as an individual, cannot participate in the ceremony. It would be equally a violation of his right of conscience if he were required to administer *according to the faith of the candidate* and contrary to his own, as it would of that of the candidate to have it administered *according* to the faith of the administrator, and *contrary* to *his* own. It would be a moral impossibility for a young convert to solemnly submit to a ceremony, ostensibly purporting to be baptism, when, in heart, he did not believe it to be so. Would it be *any less morally impossible* for an administrator to officiate in that ceremony, repeating the consecrating language "I baptise you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," when he sincerely believed he did not baptise him? The only alternative in such a case is to call in the services of a brother minister with whose views the proposed "mode" will be accordant.

9. Need it be farther said, that *every denomination's custom*, as it respects this and all other religious rites, which now prevails should *not only be tolerated*, but have given it *an impartial consideration*, an *equal opportunity* in the Church? Our liberality, in this respect, should not be *merely professional*. The majority of christians profess to hold "modes" and forms as matters of indifference. That immersion, pouring,

or sprinkling for baptism, for instance, are all equally approved. How can such, unless their pretensions are hypocritical, exert their influence to secure to *one* of these modes a decided preference, and show *something more than a willingness* that another should be rendered repugnant? On the other hand if one of them seems to a part of the church without scriptural authority or example, why may it not be left by those who thus view it, under this apparently *sufficient condemnation*, without heaping upon it reproach?—A just regard for the *feelings* of brethren, if we are so prejudiced as to have no respect for their opinions, and especially the consideration of rights they hold in common with ourselves, will require, on all hands the laying aside of all constraint and contempt in exercise towards the prevalent usages of saints.\*

10. Communion, in the church, should cease to be considered as any thing more than *christian communion*. That is, *christian character*, should be *its only condition*; *christian fellowship* the *only fraternizing tie*, and *christian instruction* the only conversation introduced to solemnize and render profitable the service. By making the Lord's supper more seclusive or sectarian in its character than this, we seem to be plainly turning aside from its design when instituted. "Do this," saith Christ, "as oft as ye do it, *in remem-*

\*The ordinance of baptism has here a prominence given it, not because it is viewed to be *more important* than other duties, nor because it is viewed to be, the only custom in the church to which the principle involved applies. But because it occupies such a place in the estimation of the sects as to *need* more particular notice; and opposes more obstacles, than perhaps all other customs, on which the church is divided combined, to the union of the saints. If the application of the principle of christian forbearance in respect to this is apprehended, it is reasonably hoped that its influence on other disputed topics will not be overlooked.



*brance of me.*" The recollection of *how much else*, most foreign from the commemoration of the Savior's death, is compatible with a consistent regard to this special command? "Let a man *examine himself* and *so let him eat*," says the inspired apostle, when giving direction how the supper should be celebrated. How much *examination of brethren* can consist with that thorough and humiliating searching of *one's own heart*, which is indispensable to partaking without condemnation? If a grateful recollection of Christ's sufferings, and the salvation they have purchased, be what the blessed Savior designed in this ordinance, he will assuredly be most delighted with the ceremony's being participated in understandingly and solemnly by all who have been redeemed by his blood. And if *self-examination* was enjoined as its *only* and *all important* preparatory exercise, it certainly must have excluded *the examination of others*. Scrutinizing enquiry into one's own sins, accompanied with suitable humility and repentance, is incompatible with even the observation of the sins of others. There will be too formidable 'beams' observed in *our own* eye, to permit a peep over them, after 'motes' in our brother's.

11. But while the door of the church should be *open to all saints*, it should nevertheless *debar all sinners*. It is equally schismatical to admit unbelievers, as to reject christians. In the one case we reject an element of union, in the other admit an element of division. In the first instance, we necessitate the existence of separate and rival church organizations, by narrowing the platform of our own, so as to afford no place for materials which should have been built up with us upon it. In the latter, we introduce into the body of the church materials which are foreign and destructive. There can be no religious affinity between converted and unconverted minds. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is

born of the spirit is spirit." "And the flesh lusteth against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh."—The feelings designs and efforts of christians and the impenitent must necessarily, if called out effectually, be at war with each other. Paul, in view of this fact, exhorts "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness, and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?"

It is said that we are unable definitely to ascertain who are christians, and therefore the test prescribed cannot be practically applied? This is proclaiming that we are instituting some *new* test of membership in the church. Is it *a new thing* for churches to require evidence of piety to admission among their members? Do they now ask only evidence of sectarian peculiarities of mind, without reference to the state of the heart? If so then our position is *new* and *more difficult*. But they too require evidence of conversion, and *not only this*, but of denominational peculiarity corresponding with themselves, before a candidate is received. Certainly we attempt *no more* than they.—But the reason, with many, why this objection is raised is not because of any real doubt about the practicability of identifying christian character, for they are, in every instance of a members admission into their own church, professing to identify it, but in order to excuse a more refined discrimination. They pretend they cannot decide who are christians and who are not, and therefore they will go *even farther*, and having first drawn, according to their judgment, the line of distinction between the true saints and those evidently impenitent, they venture to discriminate still more closely, and mark out as worthy of special and pecu-

liar favour *a part* of those acknowledged christians. Whose dilemma, of the two, is to be preferred? But there are those who seriously contend that men have no right to set in judgment over the religious character of others. That we must receive every man upon his own professions, and make the church and its ordinances free to all applicants. Such set aside *all tests of fellowship* as sectarian, and all enquiry into men's evidence of piety as an unwarrantable assumption. Our limits admit of no argument with such. If their position is *tenable*, (what we have little reason to believe) it is so far in advance of what the christian community now are prepared to receive, or what its *first necessities* by way of *liberality*, demand, that we may safely pass it by with but little attention. We simply say—God has given us reason with which to compare together objects of the *moral* as well as natural world. So that we cannot help, if we would, discerning what is fit, or becoming, and what is not, in accountable beings. He has given us also bibles, and other sources of religious information, in which is definitely set forth what constitutes christian character, what fruits evidence a new birth. So that charitable as would seem a profession of not judging of a neighbor's christian character, we are utterly *incapacitated* to refrain from judging. We cannot help, with our bibles in our hands, and a world of mankind around us of whose characters and destinies it most solemnly treats, applying them together in a way to bring out opinions of the comparative characters of individuals in the light of scripture. Facts sustain the proposition. Who in christendom, even of those who profess such an abhorrence of judging their neighbors in respect to their standing before God, practically refrains from passing such judgment? When one's conduct or spirit is manifestly contrary to the bible exemplification of piety, what scripture has given as the fruits

of a converted heart, how quickly will they exclaim, the tongue betraying their false professions; "That man cannot be actuated by christian principle, he does not evince that he is born of God." The veriest Infidel and the vile blasphemer even shrink not from passing judgment on *what is christian*, and what is not, *who is a child of God*, and who manifestly without so divine a parentage. And this is their condemnation that out of their own mouths they may be judged in the day of the Lord.

Again, when an individual offers himself to the church he *asks its fellowship*, and extends to it *his own*. There must be a recognition of each other as christians, before the natural obligations, which the scriptures enjoin upon brethren, united in such a relation, can be assumed. No object is gained by the applicant if his reception does not thus imply a recognition of his piety. He, in fact, does not become a church member, for the society he connects himself with, if *such* it may be called, has none of the characteristics of a church. Church visibility, in such circumstances, must at once die, individual membership becomes a nullity, and all personal responsibility and fraternal feeling expires.

It is said we have no divine warrant for making *evidence of piety*, as the church shall judge, a test of membership. We have all authority if inspired injunctions and apostolic example are worthy of regard. "Such" were added to the disciples, "*as should be saved.*" A candidate desiring the ordinances and a place among God's people was informed that the condition of his acceptance was that he should *believe with all his heart*. And, in every case, this was the *sine qua non* in answer to the enquiry—"what shall we do?" Exclusion was the divinely appointed penalty upon such as brought not *this doctrine*. And when the church 'was assembled together,' had col-

lected in its organized capacity, it was to 'put out from among its members' 'wicked' persons. Here is a divine warrant, plain as the most sceptical can reasonably ask.

12. But, in our liberality, we must guard against letting our charity betray us into an alliance with *spurious professors of piety* and into a *truce* with dangerous and even *fatal* errors. "Union" may become so pleasant in our eyes, that we may hardly know where to stop, in gathering in its professed friends to our embrace. So honest and confiding we may be too, in this very *amiable* business, that, ere we are aware, the balance of influence, in any society of individuals embarking together in this enterprise, may become favourable to the promotion of what will be poisonous to true holiness. "Union" is a favourite word with all religionists. And especially so with such as feel themselves to be out of fellowship with the mass of God's people. However many may be the tears of such over the intolerance of the church, and honest and fervent their desires for its reformation, when *such circumstances* give any reason to suppose that the *ruling motive* may be selfishness, and the source of their griefs, wounded pride, we have reason to be jealous of their co-operation. We cannot safely engage in the work of christian reformation with men whose love of union, is only the love of seducing men into error, and whose hostility to creeds is only hatred to the fundamental truths which creeds commonly embody. Such men may be very clamorous against religious intolerance, and in favour of "union," when any thing but *good fruits* may be expected from their professions.

Equally should we be guarded against an amnesty with *fatal sentiments*. We do not say no place should be allowed in the church to individuals indulging *great errors*. All evidently should find a home here

whom God will accept among the redeemed in heaven. And we do not hesitate to admit that few, *very few*, are the *false views*, prevalent among us, that do not number *among* their votaries real children of God. We are sacredly bound to recognize *all such*. But we must be aware that professions of godliness, with such, must be scrutinized upon vigilantly, for rare is the instance of true piety's gracing a deluded victim of falsehood. Here however is not the chief danger. We shall find few applicants for membership in the church among errorists such as have been described. They will find, if they are not converted, few attractions among a people so pre-eminently 'peculiar.'—The greater danger is in dealing too gently with the word of God. Of becoming less pointed and less faithful in the 'terrors of the Lord,' and the rebuking of sin. The 'united church' needs on *the whole armour*. She must not beat up for recruits around the walls of sectarian fortresses, suiting her notes to the tastes and prejudices of such as have become offended with the plain dealing and faithful warnings of christians within. This would be only forming a league with Satan, guaranteeing, for the sake of increasing our nominal friends, to muzzle the word of God, and muffle the sword of the spirit. We must go forth, against our enemies with the naked truth for our defence and reliance, like the stripling David in the face of the giant of Gath.

But how shall this change be effected? What definite means shall be employed to secure it? This brings us to remark :

13. That a decided preference should be given to *reformatory* over *revolutionary measures*. The great mass of saints, whose union we seek are now embodied in denominational churches. They have been placed there *by necessity* rather than *choice*, and continue their sectarian relations more from a fear of mak-

ing the condition of things worse by an attempt to change, than from any lack of consciousness that a change is demanded. They entered into their present relations as the only alternative offered to them for the enjoyment of the ordinances of the gospel and the watch care of God's people. They would have preferred, and still prefer, if they can find any way to bring it about, membership in a church which welcomes all saints, irrespective of party, and which may embody the whole household of faith in the community. All such need, is light and encouragement. And their number and influence in the church reasonably excite the hope that they will co-operate efficiently with us in the work. Through them we may act upon the great body of God's people. They will serve as the leaven which silently and yet actively is to leaven the whole temple. We must not throw ourselves off from the confidence and co-operation of the liberal and spiritual of denominational churches. Good policy requires that amicable feelings and conciliatory measures be employed towards existing church organizations. And this is not all. Our principles urge us to moderation and forbearance. Consistency requires that we not only be zealous for the promotion of liberal sentiments, but that we live ourselves as the examples of their spirit. The churches now existing, in the main, we recognise as christian churches, i. e. we believe them to be composed of pious persons, and associated for the appointed purpose of mutual edification, and concentrated religious influence. They may be *reformed* without being disorganized or supplanted. It is not necessary to their occupying a correct position that their members should individually cut asunder the tie that binds them to a *part* of the family of the redeemed, but that it should be extended around *the whole*. They have admitted to the circle of their fellowship a *portion* of those whom God has evidently redeemed, they have only to admit those also who re-

main. This is a simple work and one, when attention has been properly turned to it, which can but secure a favourable attempt. Let churches now organized in different locations have first a *fair trial* before any measures are employed calculated to subvert them.—We must aim, and aim directly at having churches organized every where ultimately on the right model. And our design need not be concealed. But there is equally a *right way* to secure an end, as there is a *right end* to be secured. There is such a thing as *contentiously attempting to quell contention, bitterly opposing bitterness, a dividing, sundering way of healing divisions and Sunderings*, which above all dangers we should seek to avoid. We must not suddenly or rashly push for *new* organizations in presence of *old ones*, unless existing evils admitting of no other remedy press upon us the obligation. It will be early enough for a *new church* to be organized on the right model, when the *old one* has had its opportunity and failed to improve it, and when the community has become sufficiently enlightened on union principles, and so fully imbibed them, as to render the undertaking no longer an experiment. For, however free such a church might be from the antagonistic principle which arrays it against some whom Christ has evidently received, yet if it be surrounded by sectarian churches, against which it appears to have too eagerly raised an opposing standard, it can hardly expect to escape the charge or the crime of sectarianism.

Similar precautions should be used in disposing of personal relations to denominational churches. It is an easy thing to violate our principles in the first step we take to promote them. An individual has become convinced of the correctness of union views, and is decided for one to adopt and pursue them. But he finds himself connected with a sectarian church. What course does duty point out for him to pursue? Circumstances must generally direct. Of one thing he



may be certain, that, in no instance, he should compromise his liberal views. That in every thing where he is called to act he should be governed by impartial feelings towards all saints. And that he should not hesitate to promulgate union sentiments and labour to secure their adoption by all religious organizations. The pursuit of such a course, without doubt, will frequently result in one's being set aside by his brethren from church fellowship. If so, happy is the circumstance, to him who is excluded, that he is entirely *passive* in the transaction, and that no other charge stands against him, but that of loving and fellowshiping alike all who manifest the image of Christ. Let him see to it also that the church understand, and the world also, that he has not *gone out*, but *been thrust out*. That he has not excommunicated his brethren, but *they him*. In other cases, an individual adopting union sentiments would be tolerated in conforming to them, and in labouring to propagate them in the church. Here an entire change of circumstances may dictate to a widely different course, and require the continuance of a connexion which otherwise would be dissolved. It is one thing to be ejected from the church for the indulgence of liberal sentiments, and materially another to *tear one's self away* from it, in professed conformity to them. In the former case, a demonstration is made of the schismatic spirit and il-liberal principles of the church, while the excommunicated individual only suffers the rapture to be made because *he* cannot honestly avoid it. In the latter he appears himself taking into his own hands the sword of division, and sundering the fraternal tie which unites him to acknowledged saints. Who, in this instance, is the schismatic? It is obvious an unjustifiable rapture has been made, and *not by the church*, much as the offended one may disclaim against its sectarianism, as the reason of his withdrawal, for the church was

willing to retain him, in the full enjoyment of religious liberty. But *he*, the individual departing, *has made it*; and why? For the last reason in the world why *he* should do it, *because the church differed from him in opinion*. They could not *then* see it to be the duty to come over to union ground. With what grace does their condemnation and excommunication come from the lips of him who preaches 'liberty of conscience' as the sacred right of all, and who grounds his only charge upon the fact that the church will not grant it to others? Is he not proceeding on the same principle, when he withdraws the hand of fellowship from them? Has he not become a schismatic in the first effort he makes at healing divisions? Time, however, and trial, and the circumstances they may unfold, will doubtless develop new courses of duty. A sectarian church may render most aggravated its policy, and most hopeless its prospect of assuming right ground. The friends of union, in and around it, may clearly see the true interests of religion to demand a separate organization. Evils may exist which such a measure alone can remedy; and prospects for Zion's prosperity be held out to encourage its adoption which can leave no doubt about duty. Discretion must guide in these things, aided by an eye steadfastly fixed upon the dictates of the liberal principles we adopt and *that charity* on which must rest all hopes of success. Nothing could be more fatal, and, at the same time, nothing is more easy, than to belie our own principles; to fall grossly, and to the observation of all, into the very error which we seek to remove.

One word more about the policy to be pursued:

14. Our *whole efforts* must not be spent in contending directly against sectarianism. We may thus at least give occasion for the charge that *we also have become sectarians*. "Unionism" is as odious to the pure mind of a consistent christian as any other *ism*. And

who does not know that the undue exaltation of any particular truth or duty above other's of equal claims is what gives it this odious feature. *Duty* actually repels, when it is thus pressed beyond its reasonable claims, and *truth itself* becomes insipid when it claims *all importance* in the mind of its advocate. There are other good things besides union, apart from which union itself would loose every charm. We must contend equally for the cultivation of every christian grace, and ever keep in mind that eminent piety is indispensable to him who would co-operate successfully in this holy and heavenly work.

Neither should we spend our whole strength in contesting this question with existing churches, even if our efforts are of the most pacific character. We must go out into the high ways and hedges, the moral wastes and destitute places, all around us, preach the gospel, and gather churches on the right model, in neighborhoods where none now exist, and where no body of christians could consider it an attempt to enter into their labours *to root up* or *to pull down*. *Build up*, and the workmanship cannot be mistaken. There are many places where denominational churches have once existed, but are now really if not nominally extinct, because they are too feeble to sustain separately religious efforts, in which scattered individuals may be collected together who love God, and his children, and his service, and who, when properly instructed may be associated together in union churches. Neither need we wait for *great numbers* or *great men*. It was with special reference to this subject and as a part of his instructions on church government, that our Savior (in the eighteenth chapter of Matthew,) says "Where *two* or *three* are gathered together" in church covenant "in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

15. A church organized upon union principles should assume a name comporting with its position.

It should be a correct definition of the thing signified. "The church" of such a town, village, parish, or street is sufficient, unless we append the term "Christian;" which, if any adjective is needed, seems appropriate to "the bride the Lamb's wife." She ought not to disown or lay aside the name of *such a husband*. It is a reflection upon her love for him.

16. Such a church must hold *impartial intercourse* with all neighboring churches. To do this, she will need to hold councils and meetings for devotional and business transactions with all irrespective of party lines. They should be called with reference to local limits only, of size and character adapted to the object sought. It should hold no fellowship or participation with Associations, Annual Conferences, Synods or General Assemblies, as the representative bodies of the parties which have originated them. But it is not necessary to cut loose from our co-operation in all the benevolent operations of the day. We can without partiality or constraint give for them all, as our means will allow. All benevolent efforts must soon devolve on the church, in its *organized* and individual capacity. The day of voluntary associations, embodying both christians and the impenitent, acting together in efforts for evangelizing the world, has evidently nearly gone by. They have become too mechanical to be vital or energetic; and throw the responsibility of the business too much into unsanctified and uninterested hands. Like the image observed in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, they seem composed "part of iron and part of clay," and will easily crumble to pieces. Every local church must be made a benevolent society, in extenso, and every man in it an active member, giving freely as *every enterprise has need*, for objects of benevolence and philanthropy.













